

## Biblical Soap Opera

*So often we talk about Biblical characters as if they were all one happy family. Read a bit deeper and it could be Shameless or EastEnders of Coronation Street. I return to this story many times, partly because there is something real about the mess this family get in, and partly because it is the story that marks the divergence of the Judaeo-Christian faiths and the Muslim faith. Of course, in Islam it is Abraham and Hagar and Ishmael who are chosen by God. Although this Eucharist follows the family tree and soap opera of Abraham and Sarah, I like to think that God also travels with Hagar and Ishmael and our Muslim sisters and brothers.*

Abraham and Sarah  
called by God  
set out on a journey  
called to raise children  
to move their tents from place to place  
as grazing for the goats allowed  
called to nurture one another  
a happy, loving close-knit family

But right from the beginning  
things start to go wrong  
Sarah laughs  
at the ridiculousness  
of what God asks them to do  
Abraham gets it wrong  
and heads off to sacrifice their only son  
and God has to step in and say No!

The tents are pitched  
water and grazing found  
fires lit to keep away the chill of the night  
blankets laid and food prepared  
but Hagar the maid servant is not left to sleep  
and the new life of Ishmael swells within her  
the seeds of discontent that will last millennia  
are sown in the middle east.

A servant is sent  
to return to Isaac's people  
and Rebekah fills her water jar  
and offers a stranger a drink  
an arranged marriage follows  
and a whole entourage make a new life  
Rebekah and Isaac's love at first sight  
turns and ends in deceit.

Jacob and Esau, the twins are born  
one holding the heel of the other  
two very different characters  
fuelled by a mother's favouritism  
breeds jealousy and deception  
stealing first an inheritance  
granted by birthright  
and then the favour of a father's blessing.

Two sisters and a father with a dowry  
a broken agreement  
and not one, but two, marriages  
Rachel's beauty and Leah's fertility  
source of unhappiness and disharmony  
maidservants once again used and abused  
and thirteen brothers can't get along.

A not so pretty story  
an all too familiar story  
that bleeds itself into the here and now  
of child abuse and neglect  
of favouritism and ostracism  
of jealousy and theft  
of broken promises  
and families torn apart.

A not so pretty story  
an all too familiar story  
as Jesus, on the night he was betrayed  
by one he thought of as a brother  
took bread and tore it apart  
this is my body  
broken for you, broken by you  
do this in confession of your brokenness.

A not too pretty story  
an all too familiar story  
as Jesus, on the night he was denied  
by one he thought of as a brother  
took wine and shared it  
this is my blood  
forgiveness for you, forgiveness by you  
do this in celebration of reconciliation.

*[share bread and wine]*

God of Abraham and Sarah  
God of Hagar and Ishmael  
God of Isaac and Rebekah  
God of Jacob and Esau  
God of Rachel and Leah  
God of you  
God of me  
God of all who are hurting  
God of all who are angry  
God of all who are grieving  
We have made our confession  
in broken bread and spilt wine  
forgive us  
and help us forgive each other.

God of Abraham and Sarah  
God of Hagar and Ishmael  
God of Isaac and Rebekah  
God of Jacob and Esau  
God of Rachel and Leah  
God of you  
God of me  
God of all who are hurting  
God of all who are angry  
God of all who are grieving  
We have celebrated the hope of reconciliation  
in bread shared and wine offered as a toast  
to you, to us,  
may we live in harmony as children of God.

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