

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.

©Clare McBeath & Tim Presswood, 2007