

Sermon for Sunday 21 June 2026 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore, Maryland

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost/Father's Day

Scriptures: Genesis 21:8-21; Psalm 86:1-10,16-17 (Insert: Alternate leader/**people**); Romans 6:1b-11; Matthew 10:24-39

Sermon: Ordinary Time. The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost. Father's Day.

I'm tempted to say the gloves are off now. We're dealing with serious business. I don't recall any Mother's Day with as harsh scriptures as the one about Sarah kicking Hagar and her son out today. We tend to deal with the soft side of parenting on Mother's Day. Notice today, however, we have one prayer that speaks about the dark side of Dads: "Where they have hurt us or fallen short of our expectations, may we learn from them, that we might not repeat their mistakes." That's pretty frank. And listen to this, from God to Abraham: "Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you," (even though it just said, "The matter was very distressing to Abraham.") It's not so much fathers. Abraham is soft-hearted in this bit of Sarah and Abraham's life together.

I have a problem with computers that really limits me. I can't look up my old sermons. I can find all the services from 'way back, but those precious ideas I gave you all in my own words are not available any more. Three years ago, on this Sunday, Father's Day's sermon title was "Hard Times." I guess I'm still saying that about these texts and this Sunday.

Paul's rough too. "Shall we sin more so that more may be forgiven?" "By no means!" he snaps. You've died with Christ, now you must live the new life of Christ and leave off sinning. Isn't Jesus big on forgiveness?

The Psalm also begs God to help us, rescue us, save us. All good stuff, but like I said before, "Hard times."

And then Jesus in Matthew's Gospel. He's really harsh today. "Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me."

What if this is one of those periods in history, and in church life, just as it happens in our personal lives, when God really is doing a new thing? Not necessarily world-wide, but with us. For example: Should we have just one Sunday service? That

may seem out of line for this discussion, but something just that ordinary may get the point across for us. Something just that clumsy and questionable may get us to asking why we stay so small when we do good things and treat one another with quite a bit of honest respect and even sympathy most Sundays.

Let us pray. Dear God, remind us, in ways that don't shame or scare us, but just get us thinking with an open mind, how much stock you have in us, how precious you find us, how intrigued with our unique gifts you really are. When Jesus sounds rough and Sarah changes her mind under new circumstances, help us not give up. Help us experiment with the energy faith gives us. We do love you, and we love one another. Watch us pass the peace. It's good energy. We're your clay. Mold us just as you have so many times before. We've grown. Help us do some more. Thank you. Amen.