

So she (Hagar) named the LORD who spoke to her, "You are El-roi" (God of seeing or God who sees).

Genesis 16:13

The Practice of Seeing

Over the past few months, I have found myself reflecting one of the stories of Hagar. In Genesis 16, she is introduced as the Egyptian slave of Sarai who is given to Abraham as a second wife to give them both the heir that God has promised. Sarai deals harshly with her when she becomes pregnant, and Hagar runs away into the wilderness. There in the wilderness the angel of the Lord finds her by a spring of water. After their meeting, Hagar names the Lord, El-roi or God who sees.

El-roi, God who sees, names the action of God's attention placed on those who might otherwise be unseen. Hagar flees a situation where she is unseen. Taken advantage of as a vessel rather than valued as a member of the family. God's seeing is restorative and gives strength to Hagar to return.

I have been meditating on this passage because in many ways I am learning how to put my attention on those who are often unseen. As the Teaching Elder Commissioner for our Presbytery, one of the ways that I participated in the discernment of General Assembly was to submit myself to the practice of Equity Primes. Each of us was given a reference card that said:

Equity Prime

We each have a choice. . . to be a voice for equity and inclusion.

When I see or hear someone being treated in a manner contrary to our values and rights as members of this committee, I can. . .

- Send a private message to the speaker
- Ask for recognition to pause and address the issue in the moment
 - Speak with the moderator at the break to address later

Am I using the meeting tools to maintain my own power?

Provisional lists of the rights of Committee members underlying the equity prime card:

- Right to be recognized by the moderator
- Right to disagree and voice disagreement
- Right not to be interrupted and be able to finish a thought
 - Right to vote (depending upon status)
 - Right to speak with an accent
 - Right to request an interpreter
 - Right to feel equal to others at the table
- Right not to be a cradle Presbyterian and have zero connection to the historical church

Throughout our meetings together, there were many times that we read these cards together. We reminded ourselves that the work of discernment involved putting our attention to what many times might be unseen in the conversation. At several points, we needed to slow down the conversation, so that those who were receiving interpretation could participate. Or we had to stop because the technology needed to be restarted for a few people. In addition to the equity prime cards, we also agreed to a Committee Covenant that encouraged us to consider what voices were not speaking and to ask who if those who would be most impacted have had the chance to speak.

The Equity Prime cards are one way of practicing together how to see people and issues that are unseen. Like all difficult work it takes practice to build competency. Throughout our time together, it became clear that the practice was shifting some of the ways that our committee was interacting. By the time, we were discussing the format for the 226th General Assembly, we were asking more questions about the impacts to groups that have not been able to participate in General Assembly due to caregiving responsibilities, hourly jobs, lack of internet accessibility, adequate financial support for the secondary costs, or accessibility challenges due to disability. I imagine that over the course of weeks and months, the practice would bear even more significant fruit.

As we are preparing for our September 13 Presbytery Meeting and even beyond looking to read and vote on around 30 amendments to the Constitution from the 225th General Assembly, my hope is that as a Presbytery we might consider practices that will enable us to put our attention on people and issues that might be unseen in our work together.

Peace,

Rev. Ally Lee

One other note: I hope that you will register this week for the EEE Mid-Year Conference. We are excited to share with you all the thoughtful reflections and challenges that Rev. Dr. Dongwoo Lee and Rev. Dr. Terry McGonigal have for us. You can find out more information including a registration link in the MMU.