

St Thomas Episcopal Church
Sermon – Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
25 June 2023

Reference Bible Passages: Genesis 21: 8-21 & Matthew 9: 35-10-23

God, grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

A little background before we talk about today's Old Testament reading from the book of Genesis chapter 21.

As we read the previous chapters, God promises Abram to make him a 'father of many nations' (Genesis 17:4)– time passes, and nothing happens. So, Sarah becomes impatient, takes matters into her hands, and tries to do God's work. She tells Abraham that Hagar, her Egyptian slave, could bear a child for Abraham and her. The story says that Hagar gets pregnant.

In ancient cultures, a women's status came from marriage and was elevated higher through childbearing. So, the role of Sarah, who was old, barren, and childless, flipped when Hagar, a young woman, was going to have a child. While Hagar looked down on Sarah, Sarah became abusive towards Hagar.

A good lesson from the story thus far is that we should not try to do God's work. In God's time, God will accomplish what God has promised.

As the story goes on, the condition in Abraham's household becomes intolerable, and the relationship between Sarah and Hagar deteriorates to such an extent Hagar, pregnant with a child, runs away from home. But God finds her and asks her to return to Sarah and Abraham. God promises Hagar that her sons and his offspring will be numerous on the earth. God tells her to call her son "Ishmael," meaning "**the LORD has listened to my affliction.**" (Genesis 16:10–11)

She is so glad to hear God's promises concerning her son that she begins to call God "the one who sees." It is interesting to note that Hagar, a runaway slave girl, a woman of color, and a marginalized human being is the first and only woman to give a name to God. Hagar meets the living God in a desert of despair, where she gives God

the name "El Roi." The God Who Sees Me." Hagar, the slave girl, was invisible to the world, and no one cared for her. Now she realizes that the divine God "sees her." Hagar is one of only a few who have spoken directly with God.

After the encounter with God, Hagar goes back to Abraham and Sarah, and she gives birth to a baby boy she calls "Ishmael," as God told her.

Now begins today's Old Testament reading that tells us an awful story.

Ishmael would have been 13 when Isaac was born, Abraham is 100 (Genesis 21:5), and Sarah is about 90. Sarah has a baby. Abraham and Sarah named the Child – Isaac. The name Isaac means" laughter."

When Isaac is about one year old, his stepbrother Ishmael is about 14 years old. Sarah realizes that even though Isaac may be "the promised one," and God may have great plans for him, she still does not want Ishmael to be in the picture. Sarah realizes that the birthright laws of ancient times say that regardless of the parent's wishes, the eldest son inherits everything. The eldest son is the leader of the family after the death of his parents.

In today's Old Testament reading, Sarah tells Abraham to chase Hagar and Ismael out of their home.

What an awful moment! Hagar and her teenage son, around 14 years old, are chased out by his Father, Abraham; now, mother and son are stranded in the desert, without water, dying of dehydration. Perhaps Ishmael would have fainted, and Hagar knew her son was so dehydrated that he would die. So, Sarah left him by a bush. Walked further up, and Hagar began to weep and said to herself, "Let me not see the death of the boy" (Genesis 21:16). Hagar knew and had seen God before, but perhaps doubted in her crisis and forgot the "God who sees" (the name she gave God).

Many times in our life, we doubt God is present and wants to help us. We try to rely on our ability and handle situations alone. We forget we have a great divine God on our side.

There was nothing for Hagar to cling to in the wilderness, no family, no friends, no phone, no doctor, no temple, no priest, or Pastor, all alone with her dying son. Even though Hagar forgot God, **God Remembered Hagar.**

Now Hagar is weeping and distressed, dehydrated, and her only 14-year-old son is at the point of death, alone in the wilderness. God asks her an intriguing question "What troubles you" (Genesis 21:17). God knows everything, but God wants us to acknowledge our hurts and pain.

In verse 17, we read, "And God heard the boy's voice." Abraham, his Father, would have taught Ishmael about praying to Yahweh, the God of Of the universe. The boy knew how to pray, and God heard the Child's voice. There are people at St Thomas, like Susan Beckham and Pam Storrer, who devote their time to teaching children at church. We need to get our children involved in the ways of God and the church so that they will remember when they are adults.

God hears the voice of innocents, the voice of the vulnerable, the voice of the marginalized, the children at our borders, and the children whose parents are in jails or prisons. We are God's face and hands in this world, and we must ask the marginalized, "What troubles you", and help those in need.

Remember God, who heard the parched voice of a praying teenager; God can undoubtedly hear and respond to our needs. Whatever our needs are, God is listening. God is asking you "what is troubling you" and waiting for your response.

The story of Hagar reminds us of a unique power, her encounter with the Devine. She bestows a name upon God. In a sense, it is a type of resurrection – a transformation from despair and helplessness to initiative, action, and power – resulting from the encounter with Yahweh.

The Biblical story of Hagar affirms and supports liberation theologians and womanist theologians like Delores Williams (1937-2022) to realize and explain the black experience. The "wilderness experience." The story of Hagar serves as an example for many black Christian women.

In closing, the Gospel passage for today read said (Matthew 10;28-31), "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs on your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows."

Remember, God loves You and cares for you! Amen.