

## **The Ongoing Story of Hagar**

Genesis 21:8-21

Rev. Dexter Kearny

June 21, 2020

Longview Presbyterian Church

The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.

But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. So she said to Abraham, “Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac.” The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, “Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring.”

So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, “Do not let me look on the death of the child.” And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.” Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink. God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Hagar has been treated horribly. She pops up a few times in Genesis 16 and 21 but is always receiving the short end of the stick. We do not know her history or how she ended up enslaved. In fact we probably do not even know her real name. The name Hagar means foreigner or alien. I doubt her parents called her that. Sarah, early on, starts to doubt God's promise and decides to have Hagar also become Abraham's wife, using her body in order to gain an heir, to fulfill their anxiety. But after elevating her to wife status, Sarah starts to despise her and treat her horribly. Abraham is either passive or absent but is really no help in this situation. His silence leads to violence for Hagar. Hagar runs away, encounters and names God, but is ultimately sent back into the abusive situation.

A number of years later, we don't know what happened to Hagar in these years, Sarah finally gives birth to Isaac. God's promise to Sarah has finally come true. God's abundance has been made clear, God is good. But then when Ishmael and Isaac are playing together, Sarah fears that her son Isaac will have to share or even lose his inheritance, that somehow God's promise will not be enough. Sarah finally gets Abraham to kick Hagar out. Abraham continues his silence. He provides a few days' provisions and then sends them into the wilderness to die. Hagar and Ishmael are in the wilderness again. Hagar is weeping alone as she expects that she and her son will die.

Many African American theologians see the story of enslavement and Jim Crow and segregation and police brutality in the story of Hagar. Many call themselves Hagar's children. The history of white America is one of privilege and promise but also of an unwillingness to share in that privilege and promise. Instead of sharing we turned to colonizing, destroying, stealing, and enslaving. We were greedy. We did not trust that God might have enough for all of us.

And sadly, we are still greedy. We still do not trust that God might have enough for all of us. We see billionaires getting richer and richer during a pandemic where unprecedented numbers are being unemployed. We see white people calling the cops on black people who are out bird watching because we have built up a fear of the other in order to maintain our control. Systemic racism is not about being kind or changing hearts. It is about a systematic way of viewing the world that has been built into all of our structures, our schools, our housing policies, our criminal justice system, our churches.

Abraham and Sarah failed to trust in God's abundance. They failed to believe that God's promises might just be big enough for all of us. They failed to stop the cycles of violence, they failed to speak up at abuses, they failed to care for the least of these. White America has fallen into the same sin. We believed that we were promised this land and that we were chosen. We did not believe that God

might have enough for everyone, that God may have made a world overflowing with abundance if we could simply share.

God is not like Abraham and Sarah in this story. God is not like White America. God *sees* Hagar dying in the wilderness. God *hears* Ishmael weeping. God, time and time again, hears and sees the cries of those suffering. God steps in and shows that God's blessing is not limited. God's blessing is for everyone. There are no insiders and outsiders. God fulfills promises to Abraham and Sarah AND God fulfills promises to Hagar and Ishmael. There is more than enough for all.

But there is a complication in this story. The role God seems to play in allowing Abraham to kick Hagar out. I wonder how we use God or God-language to justify our actions of silence and oppression. Do we say in response to Black Lives Matter that God loves everyone regardless of race? Do we use cheap slogans in order to not take action ourselves? Do we twist our God to protect us from having to help those crying out? I wonder. Because the God that meets Hagar in the wilderness does not seem to be heartless but rather protects and guides Hagar and Ishmael, providing for their needs in ways that Abraham and Sarah refused. God provides a way in the wilderness and we can be with God or we can be against God. But God's blessings are more than enough for us to share.

So my question for all of us today is where have we closed our eyes and plugged our ears? Are we afraid that there is not enough to go around, that if someone else gets more that I won't be able to feed my family? Hagar is weeping. Ishmael is crying. Our Black siblings are lifting up their voices and demanding justice. Will we hear? Will we see? Will we act?

I would like to challenge you this week to consider your schedule for the week and every week. Look at your day planners and your phone calendars. Where do you have time or where can you make time to listen to the voices of the oppressed, to see the violence against people of color? Listen to the stories, there are so many out there. Watch movies and documentaries that center black stories and experiences. Netflix and Hulu both have complete sections for this currently. Look up the Black Lives Matter website to hear the claims of God's people. And in this way, we may begin to see as God sees and hear as God hears. So that we may break the cycle of silence and violence and may share blessings with all in need.

Let us pray. O Lord open our eyes and our ears. Break our hearts for what breaks yours. We live lives of privilege everyday whether through the color of our skin, the amount in our bank account, the level of education. But you do not call us to live lives of privilege. You call us to live lives of blessing. Do not let us hoard our blessings. Help us to feel the blessings you give us but to also make sure that

those blessings are poured out into all corners of our world through your gracious abundance. Help us to not let fear or anxiety paralyze us, but rather give us courage to listen to the voices of the despised, to see the injustice that is happening all around us, and to stand up for what is right. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.