

King of Glory Lutheran Church

June 20/21, 2020

Year A: 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost: Semi-continuous: Genesis 21:8-21 & Psalm 86:1-10, 16-17

Rev. Debra Abbott

"Hagar's Journey"

***Psalm 86:1-10, 16-17***

*Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me,  
for I am poor and needy.*

*<sup>2</sup> Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you;  
save your servant who trusts in you.*

*You are my God; <sup>3</sup> be gracious to me, O Lord,  
for to you do I cry all day long.*

*<sup>4</sup> Gladden the soul of your servant,  
for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.*

*<sup>5</sup> For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,  
abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you.*

*<sup>6</sup> Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer;  
listen to my cry of supplication.*

*<sup>7</sup> In the day of my trouble I call on you,  
for you will answer me.*

*<sup>8</sup> There is none like you among the gods, O Lord,  
nor are there any works like yours.*

*<sup>9</sup> All the nations you have made shall come  
and bow down before you, O Lord,  
and shall glorify your name.*

*<sup>10</sup> For you are great and do wondrous things;  
you alone are God.*

*<sup>16</sup> Turn to me and be gracious to me;  
give your strength to your servant;  
save the child of your serving girl.*

*<sup>17</sup> Show me a sign of your favor,  
so that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame,  
because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.*

***Genesis 21:8-21***

*<sup>8</sup> The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. <sup>9</sup> But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. <sup>10</sup> 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." <sup>11</sup> The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring." <sup>14</sup> 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.*

*<sup>15</sup> When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.” <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. <sup>21</sup> He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.*

We are in the middle of three weeks of stories from Genesis. Last week we heard the story from Genesis 18 of Abraham and Sarah and the three visitors who said that Sarah would have a son. This was an amazing announcement because Abraham and Sarah were very old.

When Sarah heard this news she laughed. Sarah had long since given up any hope of having a child.

In fact in Genesis 16 Sarah makes a plan to have a child by using another woman. And so we meet Hagar, an Egyptian slave-girl. Sarah gives Hagar to Abraham hoping that she will obtain a child through her.

I wonder if you have ever met Hagar before? Her story is not one we share or talk about very often. But you really can't tell the story of Abraham and Sarah without telling the story of Hagar.

In Genesis 12 we meet Abraham and Sarah for the first time. And we learn that God has called Abraham to leave his country because God is going to make a great nation from Abraham in a new land. Scripture tells us that “Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran...” They pack up their things and animals and slaves and leave home.

I should have warned you that today's reading and sermon was going to make you uncomfortable. I hope it does. I hope we never hear stories of slaves without our stomachs turning with revulsion or feel anger at the injustice of people owning other people.

Today we hear a story about a slave. And right from the beginning of Abraham and Sarah's journey we know they had slaves and years later when we get to Genesis 16 they still have slaves, one of whom is Hagar.

So back to Sarah and Hagar. In Genesis 16 Sarah makes a plan, in which Hagar is a pawn and has no power over her body or her future.

Abraham goes along with Sarah's plan to have a child by Hagar and Hagar becomes pregnant. And now the tables turn somewhat. Hagar is still a slave and Sarah is still her master but now Hagar has conceived a child and has what Sarah has always wanted.

Genesis says that Hagar "looked with contempt on her mistress" and Sarah deals "harshly with her." We are left to imagine what went on between mistress and slave. But it was so bad that Hagar runs away from Sarah and Abraham, still pregnant with Abraham's child.

Hagar runs away out into the wilderness. And there she encounters the angel of the Lord, which is God. And God asks this slave-girl a question. "Where have you come from and where are you going?" God sees Hagar and listens to her. He tells her to return to Sarah and have her son and name him Ishmael. And God gives Hagar a promise that sounds very similar to the promise made to Abraham. "I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude."

Hagar is one of a very small group of people who God speaks directly to. Not only sees and listens and speaks to, but makes this incredible promise to a slave, one who is powerless, poor and oppressed.

God tells Hagar to name her son Ishmael, which means "God hears." And then Hagar names God. She says "You are El-roi" which is a bit harder to translate but means something like "God who sees me." Did you hear that? Hagar names God.

Hagar, a slave-girl, who is used as an object and not seen as a person, meets God and God sees her. God sees her.

We need to know Hagar's story. We need to know the God who sees and listens to and speaks to Hagar in the wilderness. How can we know God without knowing that God makes promises to Abraham, a man who is wealthy and powerful and God makes promises to a slave-girl who is powerless and vulnerable. Our God's promises and love are deep and wide and for all people.

Well let's fast forward through many years and several chapters of Genesis. In Genesis 21 Sarah conceives and has a son who is named Isaac, which means "laughter." Sarah laughed when God said she would have a son and years later she does.

So now both Hagar and Sarah are mothers to sons of Abraham.

Sarah sees her son Isaac with Hagar's son Ishmael one day and declares that Ishmael has to go. She wants Isaac to inherit and essentially be Abraham's first born and only son. Abraham is distressed by this but God says that he should listen to Sarah and that God will make a great nation from Ishmael.

So Abraham gets some bread and water and sends Hagar and Ishmael out into the wilderness alone early in the morning. Again we reach a moment in this story that is hard to imagine or understand. But off they go.

Out there in the wilderness Hagar knows that she and her son will die. And so she sits down and weeps. And then God sees her and hears her and Ishmael and speaks. “What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. <sup>18</sup> Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.” <sup>19</sup> 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.

Genesis goes on to tell us that they lived in the wilderness and Ishmael marries a woman from Egypt. Hagar survived and God’s promise to Hagar and Ishmael was kept.

This is one of the many stories of our faith. Stories of people who have experienced God, wrestled with relationships, known conflict, jealousy, love, injustice, joy and grief. We have been given these stories that we might learn more about God and ourselves. And this story of Hagar and Sarah has the power to change our lives today.

In our own time we too know that there are people who have power and wealth just as there are people who are poor and oppressed. We are born into families we don’t choose and situations we can’t control. Right now as a nation we are wrestling with racism, poverty, discrimination, power, and politics not to mention a pandemic.

And I believe that we need to be uncomfortable right now with any system that allows violence, fear or hatred to rule our communities. We need to examine our own stories and the stories of our neighbors and listen and learn from one another.

In our story today, Sarah and Hagar are incredibly different in age, economic status, social status, power and privilege. And yet, they have things in common. They are both mothers who love their children and they both encounter God. God is with them, knows them and listens to them in their struggles and life together and apart.

Hagar and Sarah’s story informs our story today. In ways that should make us uncomfortable and hopeful. So I will leave you with these questions. Where do you expect to encounter God? Is it possible that God will speak through someone like Hagar who is powerless and oppressed? Is God speaking to you today? Will God work through your anger at injustice or your compassion for your neighbor?

Friends, our God listens and hears and speaks to all people. Our God constantly surprises us, walks with us, pushes us and invites us to lives of faithfulness, mercy and love. May you hear God’s voice today, wrestle with your faith and continue to be surprised by God’s promises and love. Amen.