

“God Heard the Cries”
Genesis 21:1-21
Pollocksville Presbyterian Church
Sermon #60
3rd Sunday After Pentecost
15th Sunday in the COVID-19 Pandemic
6.21.20

Genesis 21:1-21 CEB

21 The Lord was attentive to Sarah just as he had said, and the Lord carried out just what he had promised her. **2** She became pregnant and gave birth to a son for Abraham when he was old, at the very time God had told him. **3** Abraham named his son—the one Sarah bore him—Isaac. **4** Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old just as God had commanded him. **5** Abraham was 100 years old when his son Isaac was born. **6** Sarah said, “God has given me laughter. Everyone who hears about it will laugh with me.” **7** She said, “Who could have told Abraham that

Sarah would nurse sons? But now I've given birth to a son when he was old!"

8 The boy grew and stopped nursing. On the day he stopped nursing, Abraham prepared a huge banquet. **9** Sarah saw Hagar's son laughing, the one Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham.

10 So she said to Abraham, "Send this servant away with her son! This servant's son won't share the inheritance with my son Isaac."

11 This upset Abraham terribly because the boy was his son. **12**

God said to Abraham, "Don't be upset about the boy and your servant. Do everything Sarah tells you to do because your descendants will be traced through Isaac. **13** But I will make of your servant's son a great nation too, because he is also your descendant." **14** Abraham got up early in the morning, took some

bread and a flask of water, and gave it to Hagar. He put the boy in her shoulder sling and sent her away.

She left and wandered through the desert near Beer-sheba. **15**

Finally the water in the flask ran out, and she put the boy down under one of the desert shrubs. **16** She walked away from him about as far as a bow shot and sat down, telling herself, I can't bear to see the boy die. She sat at a distance, cried out in grief, and wept.

17 God heard the boy's cries, and God's messenger called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "Hagar! What's wrong? Don't be afraid. God has heard the boy's cries over there. **18** Get up, pick up the boy, and take him by the hand because I will make of him a great nation." **19** Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well. She went over, filled the water flask, and gave the boy a drink. **20**

God remained with the boy; he grew up, lived in the desert, and became an expert archer. **21** He lived in the Paran desert, and his mother found him an Egyptian wife.

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Hagar and Ishmael's story breaks my heart. Sure, the LORD provided them a well and God remained with the teenager as he grew up and became an expert with the bow and arrow. And

re-reading this story of a woman forced to fend for herself in the desert with nothing but a flask of water and some bread makes me angry.

Hagar's story reminds me of the people in Flint, MI who have gone six years without clean water and are watching their children suffer. Hagar's story reminds me of people who have full-time jobs and are homeless because halfway decent apartments are more expensive than what most wages can support¹. Hagar's story reminds me of the people who have to raise money online to pay for their medical expenses. Hagar's story reminds me of the people forced into modern day slavery, including right here in North Carolina, which is

¹<https://www.npr.org/2018/09/30/652572292/working-while-homeless-a-tough-job-for-thousands-of-californians>

ranked 9th of the 50 states². These stories aren't that much different than what Hagar and Ishamel faced.

And yet, God heard Hagar's cries. God heard Ishmael's cries. And praise the LORD, God responded!

Between Genesis 1 and Genesis 21, a lot has happened. The Fall, Cain murdered Abel, the Flood, the Tower of Babel, and the call of two elderly, barren people-Abram and Sarai-to leave Ur and settle in Canaan.

²<https://ncadmin.nc.gov/advocacy/women/human-trafficking/what-human-trafficking#human-trafficking-in-north-carolina>

And God promised them descendants more numerous than the stars!

But, the realization of God's promise didn't happen when it was convenient for Abram and Sarai. And they took matters in their own hands. Hagar, a slave in Abram's house, was forced to have sex with him. What was first an inconvenience turns into dysfunction which has lasting repercussions felt today between the three Abrahamic faiths.

After Sarai harassed Hagar, the expectant mother ran away. But, the LORD had other plans for her and promised her that her son

would also have numerous descendants. Hagar went back to Abram and Sarai and gave birth to Ishmael.

Thirteen or so years later, and after their names were changed by God, Abraham and Sarah were visited by three strangers who told the elderly couple that the promise of Isaac would be realized in a year. But, out of cynicism, Sarah laughed.

Now, we are placed in the story when Isaac has just been weaned. Abraham is about to throw a party and Sarah is threatened by Ishmael and forces him and his mother out in the desert to fend for themselves. Of course, we are told that God promises Abraham

that Hagar and Ishmael will be taken care of. But for a while, it looks like that promise was made in vain.

And there they are in the heat of the day. The water is gone and Hagar cannot look at her son's suffering. They are staring death in the face. Both are crying. And God heard their cries.

The messenger of the LORD appears to them and says to Hagar: "Don't be afraid! Be the boy's protector and God will make from him a great nation." As a physical sign of God's promise, God made a well so Hagar and Ishmael could have water and live.

I think of this story not only in light of what's going on around us today, but also in light of an exiled people. If the Israelites are hearing this story in a foreign land and their homes have been devastated, what do you think their reaction would be to this story? At one point, they were privileged, like Sarah and Abraham. They had the power. Now, they are in the desert like Hagar and Ishmael. They've been cast out with little provisions. It seems hopeless, yet as is the case with Genesis, nothing is hopeless. That's when God does the best work. From the jaws of death, a well appears which gives way to new life.

Maybe this story forced the exiled people of God thousands of years ago to examine themselves. If God was to cause new life from lifelessness from someone who had been cast out from her

home, then what would God do for an exiled people who trace their lineage through Isaac to Abraham? People of the Covenant would also experience the well in the desert like Hagar did all those years before. A sign of what's to come. And that sign is hope, life, and peace found only in our LORD.

You know what else is peculiar about this scripture? It didn't end with a well, though that's important. Yes, Ishmael grew up and was eventually married. Genesis 21:20 tells us something extraordinary: "God remained with the boy".

God remained with the boy.

Not only did God hear the cries of the mother and son, not only did God provide a well to get them through the next step of their journey, God REMAINED with the boy. God did not forsake the mother and son.

If God did not forsake Hagar and Ishmael, don't you think the Israelites in exile would take comfort knowing that God hadn't forsaken them? And what about today? I'm convinced that while we may forsake others, God hasn't forsaken those who face circumstances that look like Hagar and Ishmael's story.

If God is to provide and fulfill a promise to Hagar and Ishmael, God does the same for those who are facing similar realities in 2020.

God hears their cries. God hears the cries of the parents who have struggled to put food on the table for their children. God hears the cries of single mothers whose spouses have been thrown in prison, lost to violence, or have abandoned their families. God hears the cries of children who suffer every day due to hunger, violence, and homelessness. And God remains with them. And God calls us to be that well in the desert for those who have lost everything.

Indeed, this is a hard story to digest. Regardless of what happened and how it happened in today's scripture, I give thanks to God who tells us throughout the scriptures that God is the Parent to the parentless, the Comforter to the comfortless, the Balm for the sin-sick-soul, the Advocate for the weak, and the Well-Maker in the desert.

God remained with Ishmael and Hagar. God remained with the exiled community thousands of years ago. God remains with those who may have been forsaken by society. And God remains with us as we are led to those places in the desert where we are vessels of the Life-Giving Water.

Beloved in Christ, believe this Good News.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.