

Hagar and Ishmael Sent Away

⁸The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. ⁹But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, ¹⁰and she said to Abraham, “Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.”

¹¹The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. ¹²But God said to him, “Do not be so distressed about the boy and your slave woman. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring^[a] will be reckoned. ¹³I will make the son of the slave into a nation also, because he is your offspring.”

¹⁴Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the Desert of Beersheba.

¹⁵When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. ¹⁶Then she went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought, “I cannot watch the boy die.” And as she sat there, she^[b] began to sob.

¹⁷God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. ¹⁸Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation.”

¹⁹Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

²⁰God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer. ²¹While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt.

Hagar and Ishmael’s story actually begins earlier in chapter 16, where Hagar who is Sarah’s slave runs away. Sarah has given Hagar to her husband so that Abraham can have a child..preferably a son. Many theologians have given Sarah a bad rap for doing this, saying she was not waiting on God to provide and doing it her way. But, she was obviously barren...they weren’t getting any younger. In her culture that was the necessary and right thing to do. She actually sacrificed, because I don’t think she really wanted to give her husband another wife. She wanted to be the one to give him children and elevate her place in the tribe.

So Hagar was very vulnerable as a slave. It seems she may have forgotten her place and behaved in a way that Sarah found threatening. The scripture tells us that Sarah was harsh. Well, I doubt that it means she got a scolding...harsh treatment then was probably pretty harsh.

Harsh enough Even for Hagar to risk her life by running away into the wilderness to try to get back to her people in Egypt where she would probably still be a slave, but would not be an outsider, as she was Egyptian.

There, on her way in the wilderness she sees God. God tells her to return to Sarah and Abraham. God tells her

“you are now with child and you will have a son and you shall name him Ishmael for the Lord has seen your misery.”

Then she responded, you are the God who sees me, for I have now seen the one who sees me.

She returns. She trusted God and returned to a place where she was very unhappy.

Now, about 14 years later, Ishmael is a teen-ager whose father loves him, and Sarah has given birth to Issac. Abraham throws a big festival, a celebration for Issac who is now 3 or 4. The celebration was actually because Issac had survived the precarious years of babyhood.

During this celebration the scripture tells us that Ishmael mocked Issac. There are many who dispute the meaning of the word mocked. Some say Ishmael was cruel and mean. But I think he was being 13 and teasing his little brother and making trouble. This infuriated Sarah and she went to Abraham and told him to send them away. Which he does.

Abraham and Sarah have power. Abraham is the leader of a large tribe. Sarah seems to have power in her own right.

They are powerful over vulnerable people. Abraham was probably fond of Hagar and he loved his first born son...but he still used his power to send them out into the wilderness.

Hagar and Ishmael are out in the wilderness, banished alone, out of water and dying.

I cannot imagine what it would be like to be tossed out by your loved ones, your family, the only home you know.

But if someone is vulnerable and others have power over you, there is always a chance that a person could be sent out into the wilderness.

But a lot of people do know what that feels like

Half of all homeless youth are lgbtq. Most have been forced onto the streets by their parents. These kids experience violence hunger and human trafficking while on the streets.

Whenever I read about Sarah and Abraham I find myself really disliking Sarah. But then as I meditated and prayed about this scripture I realized that this is a story of two mothers protecting their sons.

However, one is vulnerable, the other is powerful. Who has power like that today? Well, obviously parents. Doctors, health care organizations, anyone who has money, anyone who is a part of the in crowd...can leave others out.

We all want to protect our children. As much as I want to hate the parents who throw out their children because of their sexual orientation, I remind myself how painful that must be, how they may be thinking they are protecting their other children, how they might believe however wrong their thinking is, that they are using tough love.

Sarah was afraid for her son, after all there is always the stories of sons creating a coup to take over the top spot. There are stories of the younger brother stealing the inheritance of the oldest brother.

When my now 23 year old granddaughter first started kindergarten she latched on to one little girl as her bestie. This little girl was....troubled. she came from a troubled home. My daughter and I started talking to my granddaughter about finding other friends...trying to influence her decision to make this child her best friend.

Then one day, my daughter and I looked at each other and in unison said "what are we doing?" we are becoming those people. If it was anyone else we would encourage inclusion and care and affection....but not now when it was our child involved! We wanted to protect her. Not very Christ like of us. We then just became very involved in the friendship and talked about the differences and tried to be understanding as well as careful.

We all want to protect our children. And we should. Being a Christian can be really scary. It means standing up and saying, hey wait, that is wrong. It means loving the unloved and that can be really difficult. It means perhaps making people uncomfortable, angry even.

It means standing in solidarity with those on the outside. No matter why they are on the outside, in the wilderness.

I am sure we have all been in a public place like a restaurant and seen a person who has an obvious mental illness and there is a large open space around them. Or maybe we see a teenager all punked out with an orange mohawk and make a very wide berth around them.

It is understandable, fear is very powerful. The first words to Hagar were the same words the shepherds heard on Christmas Day..Fear Not.

One day I pulled into the post office and sitting on one of the short pillars was an obvious homeless woman...well, she had bags with her...I sat there and watched for a time...people going in and out of the post office and not one person stopped to speak to her.

I got out of my car and said hello and asked her what she was doing. She was waiting for a ride. We conversed for a few minutes. After I finished inside I again sat in my car for awhile and watched. No one looked at her or spoke to her.

She was in the wilderness...

Judy Shepherd wanted to protect her son Matthew. Matthew was murdered and hung on a fence to die near Laramie Wyoming because he was Gay. She and her husband started the Matthew Shepherd foundation to support the LGBTQ community in his name. Because she couldn't protect her child she now protects others.

I cannot imagine being her.

The other thing I cannot imagine is turning on the Tv and seeing violence, people fighting each other because my child is gay. We see and hear about riots and fighting in the street because of the hatred and fear of those who are different.

As a mother I suffer every time I see the news stories about a person who is mentally ill being shot by the police.

Many of you know that I have a son who is mentally ill. Last fall he attempted suicide. The police found him in his truck so they took him to the ER to have his blood alcohol tested. They did that, then discharged him onto the street. They had the power to send him out into the wilderness. After being found in his vehicle he was charged with DUI, given a large fine and a suspended license. Harsh treatment. And some people run away to the wilderness.

20 % of homeless have a serious mental health condition. 70% of youth in the juvenile justice system have a mental illness.

There are no institutions for the mentally ill in the United States and many end up in prison or on the streets.

we think that slavery was a thing of the past. But right now 50 million people are trapped in slavery world wide. A quarter of them are children. 22 million are forced into marriages and 2 out of 5 of them are children. There are an estimated half million enslaved in the United States.

There are and always have been those who are left out. In biblical times, belonging to another tribe, having a physical handicap, being a woman. Being a gentile.

We read about the ways others were treated during those times and we think they are strange or silly. Exclude some who is left handed? Ha ha!

But now we just have different reasons. Being a woman...being a divorced woman, being LGBTQ, being homeless or mentally ill.

God sees . he saw Hagar, and named her son Ishmael which means God hears. We must remember that Hagar and Ishmael who God saw and heard as they cried out in the wilderness were the "unchosen". He loves cares for and makes promises to those who do not belong to the people of God.

In Psalms 139 we read;

For you created my inmost being;

you knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you

when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.

Are we all fearfully and wonderfully made by God? Did God create us all in our mother's womb? Are we not all beloved children of God?

Or do we have the audacity to read those words and think I am fearfully and wonderfully made...God knew me before I was conceived and loved me and made me in his image....but not some others?

God forbid we should claim the love of Christ for ourselves and deny it to others. We are all made in the image of God we are all beloved children of God....and it is most certainly not our place to decide who can have love and who cannot.

When I worked at the homeless shelter I was speaking one day with a minister in town about some of the men's problems when he said to me, They are living in sin. My response? No more than you are sir, no more than you.

The belief that other people's problems are because they lack faith is mistaken. There are People lost and afraid in the wilderness because we lack the faith to go find them and take them the love of Christ.

The Psalmist says in psalm 130 out of the depth I cry to you Oh Lord.

There is a cacophony of voices crying out in the wilderness. People who are broken, despised, oppressed dying of thirst. God hears the cries of the abandoned and the outcast. And he wants us to hear them as well.

People who are crying out in the wilderness think there is no God, or that God doesn't love them because no one comes to help them. They think they are not seen and heard, because well, no one sees or hears them..but God does. He calls us if we listen, to reach out to those in the wilderness.

One of the things I really love about Drew's welcome each Sunday morning to the congregation is when he reminds us that we are here because God has called us and that he calls us because he loves us.

You know, I always feel my face beam a little bit...I sit up straighter.. he loves me!

One time when my granddaughter Adrienne was about 3 or 4 we were at Cracker Barrel. She and I were in the store and she found a toy she really wanted. Len was still in the restaurant so I handed her the toy and told her to take it in and ask him if she could have it. I watched her go to him with the toy and I watched him roll his eyes and sort of slump his shoulders and then say yes! She turned around with that toy held up like a prize and every adult she passed she said.. He said yes he said yes!

I feel that way when I think of how God loves me...I want to walk around to everyone and say He loves me He loves me...and then I want to say...and he loves you too!

In the words of Henry Known, To pray, to listen, to the voice of the one who calls us beloved, is to learn that that voice excludes no one.

As Christians we are to hear the voices in the wilderness and help lead them to the well that will save their lives. Because we deem them worthy? No. because Christ has commissioned us to love our neighbor as ourselves, because Christ died for us, and for all.

Let us not be Abraham and Sarah and throw people out into the wilderness because we have the power to do so, or we are frightened or because we don't think they belong

Rather, Let us remember the words of Theresa of Avila;

Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes with which Christ looks out his compassion to the world. Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which he is to bless us now.