

Seen and heard by God
Genesis 21:8-21

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It began with a party. In our Old testament reading, all the mess between Sarah and Hagar got triggered by a party. It probably was going on before for quite some time because these things tend to simmer. Let's go back to what happened. Sarah couldn't wait for God's promise that Abraham would have descendants as many as the stars. She didn't think there was anyway for her to provide an heir in her old age so she had her husband Abraham lie with her servant Hagar so he could have an heir. Ishmael, was born. But then Sarah in her nineties bore a son, Isaac. And once Isaac was weaned, there was a party. And during that party as Sarah watches Isaac playing with Ishmael, Hagar's son, Sarah decides she wants both Hagar and her son Ishmael gone. Abraham is reluctant - actually distressed, but God tells him to do as Sarah says.

Abraham sends Hagar and her son out into the desert with bread and a skin of water – probably only enough for one day. Hagar is faced with a cruel fate. When the water runs out, she moves a good distance away from her son because she cannot stand to see him die. And then God shows up. God sees Hagar in her distress. God hears Ishmael's cries. God provides water and God makes a promise – a promise to Abraham that God will make a nation of Ishmael because he is the offspring of Abraham.

It is a horrible story. The idea of Hagar, an Egyptian slave woman being used to bear a child so there can be heir in her master's house is appalling. And she is left in the desert to die when the mistress of the house now has her own child and fears for her position and her child's position. This is a very ugly story.

Perhaps it is good that we have this story, because our world no shortage of ugly stories and in this story we see how God shows up. Some of you will notice that when I use our Holy Communion prayer C and I get to the part about God of our fathers, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that I add the women's names. It becomes God of our Fathers and Mothers. God of Sarah, Hagar, Leah, Rebekah and Rachel. It used to be that I didn't include Hagar, until a friend pointed out to me how important it was that her name be remembered as well. Hagar was dealt a great injustice.

Despite the injustice, despite the ugliness of this story, God sees Hagar. God hears the voice of the her son, Ishmael, and God shows up. God says, "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."

Hagar's story is an amazing testament to God's presence with us. Think about the times when you have called out in your pain and desperation and have found a peacefulness descend on you or have found the way out shown to you. God hears us and God sees us. God transforms the ugliness of this story.

This is not the first time that Hagar has heard the promise of God to make a great nation of him. Earlier in the Genesis in chapter 16, when Hagar first conceives with Abraham's heir, God makes this promise and Hagar is so overjoyed, she starts to call God "El-roi" - the one who sees. "I love that name for God! It reminds me of this wonderful moment in the James Cameron movie, *Avatar*- When the natives on the planet greet one another they say, "I see you." Not like, 'I see you,' like, 'I'm looking at you...' rather, 'I see *inside* you.' I see you, meaning, a bringing of a readiness to be fully present with the other. I see you, meaning, 'I understand you, I

am *with* you...”¹ Hagar knows that God sees her. That is her name for God. How different would the world be if we “saw” each other on the inside, with the heart- instead of just on the surface. How different would the world be if we took to time to deeply listen to one another?

This past week I met with several of our folk to come up with the theme for this fall’s stewardship campaign. The theme we came up with is “Welcome. Come and take your place among us.” Now many of you when you hear this will think, “Come and take your place among and find a ministry to do in this community” since this was the tagline for our invitation to participate in a ministry for many years. But I believe this theme goes deeper than that.

When we say “Welcome! Come and take your place among us.”, we are also saying come and be a part of a community that knows that God sees us and hears us deeply. Come and be part of a community that will help you see God’s presence in your lives.

As much as we may not want to admit it, we are broken people. We all live with some degree of despair and trouble in our lives and we all are in need of being seen and heard by God. We are in need of being seen and heard by each other – not just on the surface. What would happen if we took the time live into understanding one another and hearing one another pain – looking past the facades we all put up. How can we take time today to see and listen to another person that God may place in our past?

My friends, God loves us deeply and just as he saw and heard Hagar in her pain and desperation, God sees us and hears us in the midst of whatever we are facing. Trust that abiding presence and keep a look out for when you are called to be part of God’s presence to others.

¹ <http://www.theologicalstew.com/abraham-3--i-see-you.html>