



The Nourishing Vocation Project

Engaging the Living Word

Hagar - Genesis 21:8-21

What is this particular text?

- Story
 - Family story
 - Story-within-a story (overall story is the birth of Isaac)
- Theology
- Promise
- Testing of faith
- Holy Messenger (angel) story

How does the text function within the scriptural story?

- An “other-ized, outcast woman” receives a promise from God
- Blessing repeated for descendants of Ishmael
- Expansive understanding of God’s blessing – not just for Abraham’s descendants through Isaac
- Example of God “making a way where there is no way”
- Reveals God’s preferential option for the oppressed
- Gives voice to the voiceless

How can this text function in the church today?

- Teaches about the origins of Islam – beneficial in interreligious understanding and dialogue
- How has jealousy harmed the church’s ministry?
- Who has the church “cast out?”
- How can the church be the presence of God that hears the cries of the oppressed?

What does the text do to you? How do you react to the text? What feelings does this text engender in you?

- Sorrow for Hagar and Ishmael
- Anger at Sarah
- Empathy
- “Aha” story about interreligious conflict

What do you have to say to the text?

- In many ways, this story explains a lot
- The families in the faith origin stories are just like every other family
- I wonder how Hagar would tell this story
- Is wonder how Sarah would tell this story
- Is this a “making sense out of human experience” story?

What do you see through this text from the story itself?

- Jealousy plays out in awful ways with awful results
- God works God’s ways, in spite of human failings

What do you see from within your church/community/world? (2022)

- The church has too often been in the role of Sarah – hoarding the promises of God
- The “us and them” mentality is tearing us apart
- Invites us to consider whose voices need to be “decentered” and whose voices need to be “centered” in church/community/country/world today
- Crises of today
 - Slavery
 - Human trafficking
 - Bodily autonomy
 - Women and children bear the brunt of forced displacement
 - Young people harmed / cast off by families (including the church) particularly 2SLGBTQ+

What do you see within yourself?

- Mirror – when have I been Sarah?
- Mirror – when have I been Hagar?
- Mirror – when have I been Ishmael?

What is the context – textual and historical?

- Follows the promise of a [son to Abraham and Sarah](#)
- An “in between” story
 - Set amid the birth of [Isaac narrative](#)
 - Precedes the [command to sacrifice Isaac](#)

What questions does this text raise for you?

- How could you, Sarah?
- How could you, Abraham?
- How could you let this happen, God?
- When do we question if God’s promises are big enough for others?
- What were the boys told about each other as children and as they grew up?
- What was Ishmael told about his father as he grew up?
- When is bread and water enough? When is it not?

What words/themes seem of particular import?

- Cast out
- Inherit
- Distressing
- I will make a nation of him *also*
- Bread and water
- Wandered
- Cry of Hagar
- God hears; God promises
- With – holy “witness” of God

What is the Gospel / transforming Good News within this text?

- God hears



- God answers
- God promises
- God is with
- God's vision is greater than our own

What is the as-over-againstness of this text?

- We get in the way of God's promises
- We hoard God's promises
- We cast others out and away from God's promises
- We try to decide who can "inherit" and who cannot
- The wilderness wanderings are real
- Bread and water are not much sustenance upon which to survive in the wilderness

Who does this text say that Jesus is, or if not Jesus, then who does this text say that God is? What does this text say about God?

- God makes a way
- God hears
- God cares
- God responds
- God's embrace is wider than we can imagine

What have others said about this text?

- ["For the second time in her life,"](#) Hagar is visited by God (or an angel of God; often in Genesis the line between the two is blurred). "And God heard the voice of the lad" (21:17). In Hebrew, the first few syllables of this verse are the name "Ishmael" — "God heard". And it is the only time in the whole story that Ishmael's name appears, as if to emphasize the meaning of that name — God hears. God hears the cries of the outcast and abandoned. God hears and has compassion." Working Preacher Commentary on Genesis 21:8-21, by Kathryn M. Schifferdecker
- ["Through the story of Ishmael,"](#) we know that no matter how we are treated by others, no matter how uncertain our future may look, no matter how hopeless things may seem- God hears." Theological Stew, "Abraham 3- Hagar and Ishmael in the Desert- I See You," by Linda Pepe
- ["Ishmael, the heir of Islam,"](#) cousin to Jews and Christians (all three trace their ancestry to Abraham), bears a name that signals a promise to every human being. God is not deaf, dumb or blind. He is not implacable, impersonal, or impassible, without feeling or emotion." "Ishmael: God Hears and Sees," by Daniel Clendenin

What will I teach or proclaim?

- God sees and God hears
- God is with you
- God calls us to see, hear, and act to relieve suffering
- The promises of God are for greater than we can imagine
- The church is called to be the voice of God – and embodiment of God – responding to human suffering today

