

“Do Not Be Afraid..”

Genesis 21:8-21

21:8 The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. 21:9 But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. 21:10 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.” 21:11 The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. 21:12 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. 21:13 As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring.” 21:14 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. 21:15 When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. 21:16 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. 21:17 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. 21:18 Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.” 21:19 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. 21:20 God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. 21:21 He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

Romans 6:1b-11

6:1b Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? 6:2 By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? 6:3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 6:4 Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in the newness of life. 6:5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6:6 We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. 6:7 For whoever has died is freed from sin. 6:8 But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 6:9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 6:10 The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 6:11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Matthew 10:24-39

10:24 “A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; 10:25 it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they align those of his household! 10:26 “So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. 10:27 What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. 10:28 Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. 10:29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 10:30 And even the hairs of your head are all counted. 10:31 So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. 10:32 “Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; 10:33 but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. 10:34 “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 10:35 For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; 10:36 and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household. 10:37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; 10:38 and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 10:39 Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

Things don't always work out like we planned: Sometimes things are better...most times not. Part of the human mantra is – life is just not fair. It's dangerous for sure, but we might just take a minute or two and feel sorry for ourselves and visit the 'lives' just not fair department.

Hey kids, its summer time – plan to have a great summer beach, pool...there was even talk around Christmas time of a summer trip to Disney. But then, \$4 gas gets in the way and suddenly Mom and dad's ideal trip is a camping weekend – in the back yard. And then they have the audacity to suggest that while you aren't in school there are a few things around the house you might do instead of tv and video games 16 hours a day like you planned all the way through algebra and dad even said, "Maybe you could get a job!?" Life is not always fair.

Not that life is any picnic for parents either. They have so many plans and dreams. Perfect kids, you know, one's that volunteer to do things around the house, and a nice house it is with a pool in the back and white picket fence to keep in the nice dog...you know the good life....then your youngest dream child comes home with the tattoo on the same day the oldest declares intention to drop out of college...a semester and a half away from a degree.... Forget the perfect life. Any life, all life promises a plethora of problems. It just isn't fair.

It's not fair that the economy is rotten, that property values go down while the cost of everything goes up. It isn't fair that you finally got the car of your dreams, but you only get to drive it every other Sunday afternoon cause you have to take out a personal loan to fill it up. It isn't fair that you plan your retirement down to the last thin dime and when you get there the dime is only worth 7.84 per cent of your plan. Life isn't fair.

How universal this painful ordeal of learning that the world doesn't operate according to what we believe is fair. It happens to all of us and it has always been that way.

This morning's scripture lesson offers a classic example. God called Abraham from the Tigris-Euphrates River valley and promised to make him the father of a great nation. Unfortunately, Sarah, Abraham's wife, was past the age when women normally have children. Since fathering a child is the logical first step in fathering a nation, other arrangements had to be made. At Sarah's urging, they employed an ancient form of surrogate parenting. Sarah suggested Abraham begin seeing her servant, Hagar. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but these things hardly ever work as planned.

Hagar was Sarah's best friend as long as she needed her, as long as Sarah's function was a necessary one. In order to fulfill God's plan they need an heir...any heir...even one born outside of the promise of God...

In this Sarah is much like us, faithful as long as it is convenient. Faithful as long as we feel ourselves to be under the umbrella of God's blessing – faithful as long as it seems to be beneficial to us...

But when we feel threatened, when we feel as if somehow-- for whatever reason God has made another choice – or God has forgotten me...we tend to seek another way – we make another choice or far more likely we find ourselves in despair. We find ourselves looking for another way – or we feel that God has abandoned us....

Similar feelings to those of Sarah. As things usually proceed when we decide that God does not really know what God is doing, or that God is not working on our time, things seem to unravel. Not long after Hagar has a child...God renews the promise to the ancient couple. Sure enough, things become problematic. When she becomes pregnant, Hagar ceases acting like Sarah's handmaiden and begins to act like the queen of the tent. Serious trouble ensues between the two women and Hagar finds herself out in the street. Things do not go according to plan.

It took divine intervention to get her back into the house. An angel of the Lord meets Hagar on the road and tells her to return home. In time, Hagar delivers a son and names him Ishmael (Genesis 16). Things go relatively smoothly until 13 years later when Sarah conceives and bears a son of her own. This child is named Isaac. Abraham is now the proud father of two sons, one with his wife and one with his wife's maid.

The lesson for today opens about three years later at the traditional party to celebrate a child's weaning. Sarah sees Ishmael, now 16 years old, playing with his little brother. The boys get along very well. Isaac's little eyes sparkle when he sees Ishmael. Ishmael enjoys helping to care for his little brother. Sarah, on the other hand, harbors a deep resentment. The thought that the son of her maid stands to receive the same inheritance as her son outrages her.

Now it is true that she was the one who suggested Abraham have a child by Hagar in the first place, but that was before Isaac. Things just are not going according to plan.

Oh, how many of us have found ourselves in a similar situation? Something seems like a great idea at one point in life and a terrible idea at another time. We all make choices and sometimes the choices we make come back to haunt us.

Sarah looks upon Ishmael, like a mom might look at the tattoo somewhere on the person of that errant children, she says in effect, 'that's no child of mine, as the permanent result of a choice she made under different circumstances. She tries for a course correction. She calls Abraham and demands that he get rid of Hagar and Ishmael. "Disinherit the boy and send them away," she tells her husband.

Abraham is shocked. He loves his son, Ishmael. Just because he has another son, Isaac, doesn't mean he loves Ishmael any less. Abraham cares about both his sons as well as his wife Sarah. It becomes increasingly obvious that circumstances are such that he is not going to be able to have them all together. Sarah will not stand for it. Abraham must

have mumbled about the inherent unfairness of life. He loves both his sons. He does not want to have to make a choice between them. Life is not going according to plan.

God loves all of the creation. Perfect and flawed. We are hardly, as admonished by Paul...without sin. Sometimes we don't even work on it too hard. We are too busy looking for ways to condemn the actions, ideas, and thoughts of the other to recognize how that is negative for us.

The constancy of our life is that God...in spite of what we do....cares for us.... Hagar in the midst of her great despair...so distraught as to not wish to watch the fate of her child finds herself and Ishmael cared for by God. She opens her eyes and sees what seems to be an oasis. Water is provided. Life goes on.

Life isn't fair, but that isn't then or now the final word. Much of what life is about is the plight of the lost, of the forgotten, of the abandoned, of the destitute coming and crying out for recognition. Some cry that they are in a wasteland in which no faith is evident. Some cry out that the life style they live is so far on the fringe of the norm that they go unloved.

We live in a world of abandoned and lost children. In all places in the world, in the torment of Hagar, mothers watch in anguish as their children die. Of hunger. As victims of sexual abuse. In the mean streets of inner cities. Lost in a world of drug abuse. As the innocent victims of war. And then the children who are used as pawns in the mean business of others lives. Children sold into slavery. Children held for ransom. Children in desperate need of an advocate to cry out for them.

And yet Matthew says to us today, take a look at the sparrows. Aren't two sold for a penny? And yet, not one falls to the ground that God doesn't know about. So don't be afraid, you are worth more than sparrows. No, the world isn't a fair place. Conflicts will abound. People who should be united find themselves at odds. That which has always seemed to be reliable is no longer a sure thing. There is a cross to bear.

So where does God's care and concern and love gain evidence in the world today. In a world of division and greed and self serving self interest, where does God emerge? Where does God provide that well of water and that safe place to be? When God says, "Don't be afraid," where does that fear get dissipated by the presence of the Almighty?

The oasis in the midst of the turmoil of the world, in answer to all that is unfair and unseemly and unappetizing and unappealing and unbelievably cruel in the world around us is right here in this place and in these people gathered who are known as the body of Christ, the church. And as God's Holy agent, our church, hears the cries of Hagar and those like her and strives to respond. To be a wellspring of water. To be an agent of relief. We are here to bear the message to all that there worth is far more than a sparrow. To be, for God, an answer to the terrible truth that things, in life, do not always go as God intends. But that our God does not abandon. Our God does not quit on us. Our God is a God of mercy.

God intends for life to be lived with dignity and certain basic human rights. ...we proclaimed our faith together in the Lord Jesus Christ. And in his name we have pledged anew to work for peace, justice, for the telling of Good news to the poor, for the spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world.