**Stowe Family Service – Sunday 11 August 2024**

**Known to God – Genesis 21, v14-20**

In today’s Bible reading from the book of Genesis, we hear the story of Hagar - an Egyptian woman who is described as a ‘maid servant’ or ‘handmaiden’ of Sarah, the wife of Abraham.

There’s a lot in this particular story – it’s quite a difficult story, about a very sad and challenging situation, however, the story ends with promise and hope, and there’s much encouragement that can be taken from it.

So, let’s take a look at it – here’s a quick summary.

The events took place some 4,000 years ago. Hagar was the maid of Sarah, Abraham’s wife.

Abraham and Sarah wanted a child. But after many years of trying to conceive, Sarah is unable to have a child. After more than a decade of not being able to get pregnant, Abraham and Sarah decide that Hagar should have Abraham’s child. Hagar goes onto have a baby - Abraham’s son – and he’s named Ishmael.

Living all together, Abraham, his wife Sarah, Hagar, and her child, Ishmael, Abraham’s son – it can’t have been easy. One imagines that there must have been many tensions within that household. Indeed, when Hagar becomes pregnant with Ishmael she is so unhappy that she runs away. But God promises her that He will look after her and her son, and Hagar returns to Abraham’s and Sarah’s house.

As Ismael is growing up, God promises Abraham that he and Sarah will have a child, despite Abraham being at that time a very old man.

And then, finally, in their old age – Abraham was a hundred years old - , Sarah has a child, the one she names Isaac, which means “laughter.”

This must have complicated the relationships even more.

It’s probably what we might describe today as a dysfunctional family.

Some 13 years later, Sarah must have decided ‘enough was enough’ and she insists that Abraham expel Hagar and her son, Ishmael, from their home. They were cast out into the desert wilderness of Beersheba.

The conditions must have been terrible out there in the wilderness, with hardly any water to drink.

Eventually, Hagar’s son is close to death, dying from thirst.

In this most desperate of situations, God intervenes – as we read in Genesis, God opened Hagar’s eyes and she saw a well of water. She gave the boy a drink – his life was saved.

God saved Ishmael’s life. God opened Hagar’s eyes and she saw a well of water.

Hagar went on to raise her son. As it says in verse 20 – “God was with the boy as he grew” – and Ishmael went on to become a giant of a man in history.

What lessons can we today take from this story?

There’s two particular thoughts I’d like to share with you.

**Firstly, God is there for us, whatever the situation we might find ourselves in.**

He loves us all.

God's love was demonstrated for Hagar when he provided for her and her son, when they were in the desert wilderness after being evicted, with little provision, from Abraham and Sarah's home. Just when she assumed both she and Ishmael were going to die, bringing tears to her eyes and pain to her heart, God miraculously stepped in.

And sometimes, we can find ourselves in situations when all we have is God.

Indeed, in our local communities today, and throughout the UK, and across the world, there will be many people who are in challenging and difficult circumstances, where all they have is God.

Hagar and her son Ishmael knew what it was to have nobody. They were alone, on their own, with no shelter and with very little water

Ishmael almost died from thirst in that deadly desert heat.

They had no survival skills. They were two very vulnerable people – a woman and a young boy alone in the wilderness – defenceless.

They had no friends. No extended family to run to. No money saved up in the bank. Not a sheep or a donkey. Nothing but an empty water bottle.

All they had was God – but that was sufficient.

God provided for them, and God sustained them.

We can all have hope – no matter what situation we find ourselves in, no matter how bleak things seem or how alone we feel, particular in our World today with so many issues, hardships, tensions and conflict. We can all have hope because Hagar teaches that things will be fine if all you have is your faith and trust in Almighty God.

We’re going to be OK – God is there for us, if we place our trust in Him.

Sometimes all we have is God – and that is enough!

**Secondly – God keeps his promises.**

God promised Hagar that he would look after her and her son. God did not abandon Hagar and Ishmael. He saved their lives in the desert, and was there by Ishmael’s side as he grew up to be a man.

God also promised Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son together – and Sarah gave birth to Isaac when Abraham was 100 years old.

God made his promises to Abraham, Sarah and Hagar, and he kept those promises.

God has made a promise for each and everyone of us.

As we read in the Gospel of John, in one of the best known passages in the Bible, chapter 3, verses 15-17:

“… that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life.

For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.”

Let’s just think about it for a moment. It’s basically saying ‘God is Love.’  This God out there who is beyond our knowing and yet who is within us and knows us better than we know ourselves – And then another profound message and promise - who ever believes in Him – may have eternal life. Isn’t that just amazing!

God wants to share our life and walk with us. Accepting God and believing in Him, knowing that we have the promise of eternal life transforms our lives – bringing a deep sense of joy.

What a wonderful incredible promise – truly life changing.

So, just like we need water every day to live, in order to live our lives fully and joyfully, knowing that we are loved and we are saved, we need to accept Jesus into our lives, and have trust and faith in Him, having a daily relationship with Him.

Hagar's story, therefore, speaks of the true, unconditional and phenomenal love of God which can reach us in the most isolated of places.

From Hagar’s story, we learn that - God sees, God hears and God understands – and when there seems to be no way, God makes a way.

And the story reminds us of how God keeps His promises.

And we have that amazing promise – that gift that Jesus has given us.

**“**For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.”

What an amazing promise.

And what inspirational messages of hope for each of us and for the world we live in today.

Dave Pearce

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