

Genesis 21:8-21

The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. 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.' The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. 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 after you. As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring.' 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.

When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. 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. 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. 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.

God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

Sermon

Wow. What a mess this family is.

It's so complicated and awful, so heart-wrenching and difficult. I can only imagine the distress of Abraham at having to send his own son out into the desert. Or the intensity of love that Sarah must have had for Isaac, that she would be willing to tell Hagar and Ishmael that they had to leave, in this ugly attempt to protect her own son. Or the betrayal and fear of Hagar who couldn't even watch while Ishmael suffered, but could only weep and cry out to God. Or the long-lasting effects it must have had on Ishmael to have been expelled from his father's family.



And, though our families are probably not quite as intense as Abraham and Sarah and Hagar's, family is always a little bit complicated, isn't it.

And we can debate how good a father Abraham was and what he should or shouldn't have done for Ishmael and for Isaac (and I can't imagine any of us are buying Abraham's parenting books for any of the new fathers in our lives) - but in the midst of all of this - he loved his sons. And I think that is the real hard work of fatherhood. That's what makes you a father to a child - that when your relationships get complicated - you keep loving those kids. When outside forces

make life together difficult - you keep loving those kids. When you get pulled apart or push each other away and you can't be together - you keep loving those kids. Real fathers don't stop loving their kids.

And God shows up for all of God's children in this story. God had made a promise to Abraham, that God would make a great nation of his family, that his descendants would outnumber the stars in the sky. And though the anxiety and doubt over this promise that lived in this family caused all this ugly trouble - God took their broken efforts to make it true and worked good through them. And not just one great nation was born through Abraham, but two nations grew. God saw all the hurt and pain of this family and instead of punishing them by taking away the promise - God had mercy. God doubled that promise God had made. From Isaac, a great nation grew - but also through Ishmael, the world was blessed with a second great nation.

Because God's family, like God's blessings, is always so much wider and deeper than we can understand. Even when we struggle to love each other as fully as we want to, we will always be cared for and provided for by the God who is the Great Father of Us All. And sometimes that will mean pulling us closer together with our families. Sometimes that will mean the difficult work of letting go in one way or another. Sometimes it will mean that God pushes us to open up our idea of who our family is far beyond our imagination - to include people of other backgrounds and circumstances, even other religions and races. Since God cares for all of us as God's own children - we all are brothers and sisters in Christ our Lord.

And when we try to take God's blessing from our brothers and sisters - God will not stand for that - because God is too good a father. God will not let God's blessings be taken away from any of God's beloved children.

But, he doesn't come down on those who try to take more than their share of the blessing with wrath and anger - so much as he responds like Abraham does - with distress for his beloved children - and then, as only God can, by doubling down on the blessing that he shares. Letting wells spring up in the desert and making a way where there was no way. Until EVERYONE can see that in God's world we will all have more than enough and we can stop trying to struggle against one another, and fighting over who is in and who is out. And if we learn to trust in God, one day we will be able to open up our hands, to open up our homes, to widen our sense of who is family and who is not. We'll see that God's blessings for us are much greater than we are willing to admit today. That our Great Father has made for us a family of all people - to share our blessings, to care for one another, and to celebrate God's gift of love.

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