

Genesis 21:8-21
Psalm 86:1-10, 16-17

Romans 6:1b-11
Matthew 10:24-39

This story of Hagar is not exactly the kind of story one would expect to find in scripture. It may be a bit of a shock in the direction it goes. And yet, it may not completely surprise us, for this is how life goes. It is a story of life not working out like we hope it would materialize. God had promised Abraham and Sarah that God would give them a son, who would become the father of many descendants, the father of a nation. Yet, Sarah was barren. Her biological clock was ticking. The fertility treatment for that day was for her to give her servant Hagar to Abraham, and for Hagar bore the son. Hagar bore a son Ishmael for Abraham and Sarah.

How impatient Abraham and Sarah were. They were still only in their eighties or nineties. They couldn't wait for God? God made it clear that Ishmael was not the promised heir. Rather it would be a son born to Abraham and Sarah. And sure enough, when Sarah was older than dirt, Sarah bore the son Isaac. Isaac was the fulfillment of God's promise.

It is not good news for Hagar and Ishmael. Sarah is jealous of Ishmael and so she demands that Abraham cast out Hagar and Ishmael. She does not want to see them anymore. This distresses Abraham. He couldn't just send them away in that harsh environment. It was certain death. Yet, God tells Abraham to do as Sarah told him. Abraham might have been wondering who was the boss in tis patriarchal society.

This was a life and death situation for Hagar and Ishmael, and Abraham knew it. Abraham gave Hagar bread and a skin of water. They ran out of water. Hagar gives up and places the boy far away for she does not want to see him die. An angel appears, notifying her that God has heard her voice, provided her with a well of water. Even

though things don't materialize as Hagar expected them to, God is able to make a good thing out of a bad situation. God rescues them from death. God makes of Ishmael a great nation, just like he did with his half-brother Isaac. God's promise was to both Isaac and Ishmael: "I will make him a great nation." But, God's covenant he established with Isaac. Nonetheless, Hagar and Ishmael are rescued from death, and Ishmael becomes an important historical figure. God was able and willing to take what appeared to be a dire situation and bring about good results.

This is not the only time God is able to make good results out of an unexpected situation. Moses was born a Jewish boy during Israel's slavery days in Egypt. Pharaoh had demanded that all of the Hebrew male infants be killed. In desperation, his mother puts him in a basket on the river, only to be discovered by Pharaoh's daughter. Instead of death, he was raised in the privilege of Pharaoh's palace. Saul was persecuting Christians, but had such a strong encounter with Jesus Christ, he became one of the greatest evangelists of all time. He went from persecuting Christians to becoming one of the greatest evangelists. After three years of a very successful and popular ministry, Jesus was crucified, only to be resurrected. Death was not the last word! God does the unexpected. When things do not materialize the way we expect them to, God can change. It seems a bit trite to say it, but when life gives us lemons, god can make lemonade.

Life can be shattered when things we hope for, believe will happen, do not materialize. For months or years we may be been working hard for a sought-after promotion, a limb up the career ladder. We have been slowly climbing. Our colleagues, our supervisors encourage us, making it seem like that important promotion is a slam

dunk, only to find out we have been overlooked. Many people never believed that Donald Trump could be elected president. Boy were we surprised. Many believe that President Trump himself was surprised that he won. We may have been in a long-term relationship with someone, with it appearing headed toward marriage. Suddenly, the relationship is over. Life does not always go as we expect, and yet God is able to pick up the pieces. God is able to move us in new directions.

This story reminds us that God hears us, God can do something about it, and God's care for us goes beyond comprehension. When Hagar and Ishmael were wandering around the wilderness, when their water had run out, at the point of their greatest need "God heard the voice of the boy." God compassionately asks Hagar, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is." God hears us. Ishmael's name was well given, "Ishmael" means "God hears." God always hears the outcasts. There is something comforting about being heard. One of the complaints we are hearing about our politicians is that the politicians are not hearing us. They are not hearing the outcasts. Rather they hear their big donors, even though those donors do not live in their districts. God hears.

Having heard, God did something about it. God promises to make of Ishmael a great nation. More importantly at that moment, God "opened her eyes and she saw a well of water, ... and gave the boy a drink." When things did not materialize as Hagar expected, God was able and willing to do something about it.

Hagar may not have been totally innocent about what happened to her. Earlier we find out that Hagar treated her mistress "with contempt." Even though Hagar was a subordinate wife to Abraham, her pregnancy gave her status over Sarah in her

barrenness. Hagar may have been strutting her stuff that she bore the son, not Sarah. Big mistake! Servants don't treat their masters with contempt. And what about Ishmael. As one commentator suggests, was Ishmael "Isaacing," acting as if he were Isaac, flaunting his firstborn status. Isaacs name means "to laugh," because Sarah laughed when she heard she was going to give birth to a son in her old age. It can also refer to "mocking or jesting." Was Ishmael mocking Isaac. Maybe both Hagar and Ishmael had some blame for their mistreatment. Even when we screw up, God can pick up the pieces. God was willing and able to do something about it.

Things can and do go incredibly wrong in our lives. When they do, the world will sometimes tell us that such abuse in our lives is God's will. DON'T BELIEVE THEM! It is not God's will. There will always be questions about the theodicy of God, that is the "vindication of divine goodness and providence in view of the existence of evil," of "why God permits evil." It is too easy to say that abuse in our lives is God's will. However, when the world says that to you, don't believe them! Even in our suffering, our abuse, our cries, our despair, God is able to pick up the pieces and move in directions we have not even imagined. God opens our eyes for us to see the well. No matter what happens, God is always present to offer encouragement and provision.

When life goes in unexpected directions, then God does the unexpected. God's all-embracing and inclusive love is beyond our comprehension. When we think we have life all figured out, life does the unexpected. When we think we have God all figured out, God does the unexpected. God's love is beyond our comprehension. God hears us. God does the unexpected, because God's love is beyond comprehension.

Thanks be to God
through Jesus Christ our Lord.