

Learning Together 3rd After Pentecost Covid-19 – Weeping

Last week, we heard a story about laughter in the story of Abraham and Sarah having a baby when they were very old and had been married a very long time. They had waited and waited for their baby. They were so tired of waiting, in fact, at one point they gave up and Abraham had a baby with Sarah's servant, Hagar. This week's story isn't about laughter, it's about crying – Hagar crying. Now, don't worry, my challenge this week isn't going to be for you to go make someone cry! (Last week my challenge was to make someone laugh.)

Sometimes, we need to hear sad stories, though. We need to hear stories about bad things that happen to good people, so we can learn from them, and try to stop more bad things from happening. I think especially about some of the stories that have been in the news lately about people hurting other people because of the colour of their skin, or the way they look, or who they love. We need to remember those good people, and tell their stories, even if those stories are sad.

Hagar's story begins with the problem of the rules at that time about which child got to take charge of the family when they grew up and the parents got old. The rules said it went to the oldest son of a married couple. Now, Hagar's son was Abraham's oldest child, but Hagar and Abraham had never been married to each other. Sarah was married to Abraham and so that meant her son was the one to take over later, even though he was the younger of the two boys. Sarah was afraid this was going to become a problem when the boys grew up, so she insisted that Hagar take her son and leave the family now. How complicated! I wonder if you know a family that is complicated?

I wonder if you know families where there are more than two parents and that sometimes they argue and fight or have to stop living together? In today's story, Abraham gives Hagar some food and water, and sends her away from the family. Hagar does not know where to take her son, so they walk and walk, looking for a new place to live, until at last their food and water runs out. Tired, and thirsty, and scared, Hagar begins to cry and so does her son. She believes she and her son are going to die out in the wilderness, so she sets him under a bush and walks a little way away so she doesn't have to listen to him cry any more – not because she doesn't love him, but because she feels she can't help him anymore.

Hagar weeps and cries. Her hope is gone. But then God speaks to her and lets her know that even though she has walked away, God still hears her son crying. God tells her to go back to him, and as she is walking back, she sees something she didn't see before – just a little way away, there is a well full of water! She takes her son over and they drink until they are not thirsty anymore. They make their home by the well, and find food in nature around them. Her son grows up to become a very skilled hunter, and when he is old enough, she travels to Egypt and brings him back a wife to live with them by the well. With the help of his mother, Hagar, he becomes the head of his own family, instead of his father Abraham's family.

We all have times in our lives like Hagar, where something bad happens that is not our fault, and we don't know what to do. Sometimes it feels like God must not be paying attention. Sometimes it feels like all we can do is cry and walk away. Love turns Hagar around, though – the love of God and her love for her son. I wonder if she had not walked away and then turned around to see the land behind her, if she would have missed seeing that well? In this time of sadness over having to stay at home and for other terrible things that have happened in places around the world, I wonder what we might be able to see that we haven't seen before when we turn around and look with love and hope?

My challenge for you this week is to go on a "observation walk". It would be good if you can do this walk outside, but if that's not possible, you can stay inside too. Rather than making your goal to get somewhere, make your goal a certain amount of time, like 10 or 20 minutes. Walk slowly and look around, paying careful attention to what you see. Are there things you may have walked right past but never noticed before? A patch of flowers? A crack in a wall? A pencil someone dropped? A tiny plant pushing up through a crack in the sidewalk? I wonder what God will show you when you simply stop and pay attention?

Pray this echo prayer with me:

Dear God...thank you for being with us...in times of sadness...and times of joy....Help us to pay attention...to what you try to show us...and to always...turn towards love...Amen.



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