

Sermon June 21, 2026

Matthew 10:24--39:

A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; 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 Beelzebub, how much more will they malign those of his household!

So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. 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.

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 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; and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

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; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

You Are Welcome Here

Sarah and Abraham wanted to be parents. They had been married for many years and loved each other very much, and they both knew that a child would complete their little family. As time went on, as they grew older and older, that dream began to grow dimmer and dimmer. Wrinkles covered

Sarai's face, her jet-black hair turned to steel grey, and Sarai accepted that she would never know the joys of motherhood.

Until...

Until God came to Old Abraham and promised that Sarah would be the mother of his child. That they would be the ones who would birth a new nation that number more than the grains of sand at the sea and the stars in the sky!

As Sarah grew older, she began to doubt that she would ever have a baby of her own. She manipulated the situation. "If Abraham has a baby with that slave Hagar, then the baby will really be mine because Hagar is mine." She took matters in her own hands and orchestrated the birth of Ishmael, Abraham's son... but not with Sarah.

I am too old, Sarah thought. Maybe we misunderstood God's promise to us.

Sometimes it's hard to hold onto faith in the face of nothingness. It is so tempting to think that we know better than God. "This isn't what God meant, we think. I've got this! We need to do it my way."

I understand this feeling. When God first called me to ministry, my sense of call was so clear. I felt like the missing piece of a puzzle had finally been found!

Daddy. This my ministry. This is what I'm called to do

But after a while thing got more muddled. I realized that the puzzle of my life was bigger and more complicated than I realized. I stopped listening to what God was calling me to do and was sure I knew what God's plans were for me.

This is my ministry. This is what god called me to do.

After I graduated from Divinity School, I took jobs that served people. Jobs that took me from Nashville, into the inner city of Washington DC and eventually into Frederick... jobs that served families in need ... jobs in that I loved. Every once and awhile someone would ask: "When will you finally get ordained?"

"This is my ministry!" I would proclaim. "This is what God called me to do."

Yet, I never stopped to listen to the still-speaking God, to hear if I was right about that. I was so certain that I was right, I forgot to listen to God's calling voice.

A little like Sarah.

And as always happens when you take the control away from God, there were unintended consequences. Hagar felt elevated by being the only one who could bear Abraham's son. Sarah became increasingly jealous of the family relationship she could not share in. And God made them wait just a little bit longer. Perhaps God realized that Sarah really wasn't ready for the responsibility of being a mother to many nations, let alone one little boy.

Finally, the promised miracle happened. After Sarah lost all hope, she realized that she would have a child. The joy grew so strong that all she could do is open her mouth and laugh with the angels: "Is anything to wonderful for our God?"

It's a beautiful story but it is not a complete story. What about Hagar? A slave woman with no rights, no power in the decisions made for and about her. She and Ishmael still lived in the household and Sarah's jealousy grew stronger, because now she was jealous on her own son's behalf too. She worried that Isaac would have to share his inheritance... that God's promises would have to be shared too. So, once again, Sarah took matters into her own hands and insisted that Abraham throw Hagar and her son... Abraham's son... out into the wilderness. A place where she knew that they would surely die

Sarah did not understand that God's promises are strong enough to include all people. God's promises to Abraham were big enough to include Hagar and little Ishmael.

Hagar wandered in the brutal wilderness, unsure how she could survive. Finally, desperate, she leaves her young son behind because she cannot bear to watch him die a slow, painful death.

In the depth of the wilderness, God comes to Hagar too. "I hear you and I hear the voice of your child crying. Don't worry – you are not alone. I am with you and your son has his own inheritance. I have great plans for you, too!"

This story is difficult to hear. Sarah and Abraham's treatment of Hagar and Ishmael is cruel and thoughtless. There is a casual brutality to Sarah's decision to throw a young mother and her child into the wilderness. But there is an important lesson for us all here.

No matter how far we wander away from God's plans for us, we are not alone. Not only that... somehow, God comes into our lives and creates blessings out of our wrong-headed decisions. There's no indication that Hagar and Ishmael were ever part of God's plans, and yet God included them in the covenantal promises. And even though, Sarah's faith was not strong enough or patient enough to wait for the fulfillment of God's promises, God still stayed true to those promises. Isaac was born in laughter and was the first grain of sand... the first star... of the covenant.

God does not give up on us either, even when we wander in the wrong direction. If I had been ordained in an earlier time of my life, my life would be very different. I may never have moved to Maryland, met my husband or had Meg. I would not have the life-lessons learned by the many people I served in both DC and MD. And, I probably would not have been led to this congregation in this time and place. I would not know any of you. God took

the decisions I made, used them to make me stronger and called me back once again. And brought me to you, in this time and place.

Today we are reminded again to remember how much God loves us. Jesus knew that his followers would face difficult, life changing choices. God came to the early Christians as they faced hardships as bad as Hagar's. Pushed out of their families into the wilderness, facing persecution and death... when Jesus tells them to take up the cross and follow him, he knew many of them would suffer and die. And yet no matter how difficult a faith filled life might be, they were promised that God was with them. God would take care of them, just as God takes care of each tiny sparrow.

And God will take care of us too... because God loves us so much. In Love, the Word called the universe and our own lives into being. We have seen that Word made flesh in Jesus, and we see it embodied among all of us. That can't be stopped by violence or cruelty.

When we wander away from God's path, we can bring about pain and cruelty... but somehow, against all expectation, God intervenes. Sometimes we hurt people, sometimes we push them into the wilderness, but the pain that we bring also creates more opportunities for God's love to disrupt the spiral of chaos and build beloved community. So if you are stuck in the wilderness like Hagar, do not be afraid. If you are tired of carrying such a heavy cross, let God ease your load. You are not alone. You are loved and God will take care of you. Amen

Sending Forth

Beloved of God, go now into the world as people who walk with purpose.

May the God who found Hagar in the wilderness guide your steps. May the Christ who calls us into courageous love strengthen your heart. May the Spirit who opens hidden wells lead you toward justice, compassion, and peace.

Go in purpose. Go in courage. Go in love.