

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY, JUNE 21, 2026

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“My Name is Hagar...”

Based on Genesis 21:8-21

My name is Hagar, and I am a slave. I come from the land of Egypt, although it has been many years since I have seen the shores of the Nile. I was born to a poor family, where there was never enough of anything. With no marriage prospects and little hope for a future, my family sold me to traders for a few coins. I was passed along and sold from one caravan to another, until eventually, I arrived at the tents of Abraham.

While this life may sound harsh to you, it is a better option than remaining at home, suffering a diminishing line towards starvation. As a slave, I receive at least one hot meal a day, and the safety of the tents at night. As long as I keep my head low, and complete my tasks, I am safe.

Abraham is a decent man, a wealthy shepherd with many animals, many slaves, and many connections. His wife Sarah is a bitter and lonely woman, who has no sons to

lavish her love and attention on.

One day, I was called to Sarah's tent, and informed that I would have a new task. It would be my job to provide Abraham with the son he so needed, to carry on his name and legacy. And while this may sound like a scandalous request from where you sit, it was not uncommon for a woman in my position. I made myself look as beautiful as possible for Abraham. In time, a son was born. I was a mother. Abraham was finally a father, and Sarah was quieter for a while. My status among the women's tents rose. As my son grew, it became clear that his Egyptian heritage served him well. He grew strong, and wise in the ways of tending both sheep and men.

But then quite unexpectedly, Sarah announced that she too would bear a child. She was overjoyed, that at her late age, such a miracle could take place. In due time Sarah gave birth to a son. The camp celebrated. But now, I lived once again, in fear. My son was no longer needed. Our

place in the tents was precarious.

Abraham loved both his sons. But it did not take long for Sarah's bitterness and jealousy to return. In short order, she demanded that I and my son be banished; to die a slow and agonizing death in the hot sun. Again, I found myself in the desert: some water, some food, and my son holding my hand. This barbaric practise too, was very common in my day. A quick way to get rid of unwanted problems.

My son and I travelled until we could travel no more. As a woman of the desert, I knew where the water was. I could reach the next well. That was not the question. The question was:

- How long would I drag out this dance with death?
- How long would I let my son suffer?

I could not bear it, but I could not continue, knowing that death was the end of any path I chose. So I stopped, sat my son down, and prepared for the sun to do its dirty deed. I cried out in the deep

sobs one feels only in the most devastating moments of life.

Very gently, as only a whisper at first, a voice came to me.

*Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation.”
(v17-18)*

Was it my imagination? Was I hallucinating? Or was it true? Then, from deep within my heart, there came an answer, “I will try. I will trust.” I grabbed my boy and headed straight to the well nearby. We drank. We rested. We slept. I planned.

Slowly, from well to well, we made our way back to the land of Egypt. There, there would be family, familiarity, and connections to begin a new life. And so it was, that I came full circle, from a land I knew, back to its familiar rhythm, to raise my son, to hold on to YHWH’s words, to wait and see what He had planned for me, and more importantly, for my son.

- Abraham was a man caught in a battle of legacy. He loved two sons but was pressured into believing he could only chose one. He chose the lesser of two evils,

instead of standing for what was right.

- Sarah was a woman unreconciled with herself, willing to cast others aside for her pride and her jealousy.
- Hagar was a woman who lived in a world that did not leave her many options.

And if your heart clenched as mine did, when Hagar set her son down to die in the desert, then I think we’ve been given a glimpse of the heartache of Mary, as she watched her son Jesus on the cross that day at Calvary.

- Hagar gave up.
- But then, she listened.
- And then, she trusted.
- And then, she hoped once again.

The difficulty of this story, apart from the obvious drama, is that Hagar is the woman we wish that Sarah had been. Our heritage and our Christian traditions stem from the foundation that Abraham was chosen by YHWH. We want Abraham and Sarah to be the perfect couple. I mean, if you are going to be ‘the father and mother of all nations,’ then one would expect something rather extraordinary from them.

- We want Abraham to hold his ground with Sarah and announce that he can love two sons just as well as

one, without losing focus on who will inherit and carry on the family name.

- We want Sarah to lose her bitterness and unresolved anger once her son arrived, and walk with her in a new chapter filled with the kind of love that often comes packaged along with a baby.

And yet, it is Hagar, the concubine, the slave, the one with no voice, no rights, and no choice who becomes the heroine.

- Sacrificial love that breaks our heart.
- Trust in a voice she cannot see.
- Vision for a future that is unfolding with each step closer to Egypt she travelled.

God does not just Call the strong and the powerful.

God also Calls the weak, the powerless, the unprepared.

He gives them vision

He puts solutions in their path to the problems that arise.

He shows them the well of life and sends them forward in His name.

Hagar was an unlikely heroine for the cause of faith.

Are you also, an unlikely hero?

Amen.