

**ST PAUL'S CHURCH (RONDEBOSCH)**

**21 JUNE 2020 (LOCKDOWN DAY 87)**

**READINGS: GENESIS 21:8-21//PSALM 86:1-10, 16-17//ROMANS 6:1b-11// MATTHEW 10:24-33, 40-42**

.....

*God you speak to us as a loving father  
Help us to take time to listen to your call  
To take our place in your services  
And to be open to what you are saying to us  
We ask this through Christ our Lord AMEN*

Happy Father's day to all the Father's and all those who are not biological Fathers but are a role model or a mentor too many children. (Hope you have a blessed day)

**Our Old Testament reading (Genesis 21:8-21) is a story about a father and his family. Let us reflect on the text**

*Sarah* was Abraham's wife, she had a husband who loved and did everything she asks. She had servants, even her own personal maid. She had everything she needed but something was lacking! Sarah wanted to give *Abraham* a son but could not because she was already well in her age, over 90 years old. Out of desperation, she gave her slave girl *Hagar* to Abraham so that through her she would have the son she always wanted. Her plan was successful! Hagar became pregnant and gave birth to a son! And he was named *Ishmael (means God hears)*. But, Sarah was still not satisfied! Hagar had given Abraham something that she could not so she made Hagar's life unbearable! Hagar ran away but, the Angel of the Lord spoke to Hagar and told her to return to her mistress and to be submissive to her. In our text today, Sarah's circumstances changed. God saw Sarah's anguish and finally fulfils his promise to both, Abraham and Sarah!

In Genesis 21 v 1 we read Sarah gave birth to her own son Isaac! Finally Sarah has everything she ever wanted. She was overcome with joy! **Isaac** was about two or three years old when Abraham held a great feast because his son had been weaned. They were now one big happy family. Abraham had two sons and Sarah had the child she longed for. Everything seemed perfect but then, something happens, which changes Sarah's attitude!

Sarah saw her son playing with Hagar's son! She realised that Isaac would have to share the inheritance with Ismael. Hagar and Ishmael would always be there to remind her of the past! She then tells Abraham to send the slave girl Hagar and her son away. Abraham was very upset! He loved both his sons! How could Sarah expect him to send his own son away? What a sacrifice!

This must have been painful for Abraham. His son's would be separated from him forever. How would Ismael feel? He had known the love, protection and provision of his father from the day he was born. Soon that would be no more! God said to Abraham "*Listen to whatever Sarah tells you because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. I will make the son of your maidservant into a nation also because he too is your offspring*"

**Here we see God promises to bless both Abraham's sons.** (Isaac and Ishmael).

The rest of the scripture reading tells us about Hagar, her son Ismael and her encounter with God.

**Hagar and Ishmael** are now all alone walking through the desert. Ishmael was probably almost a teenager by now and must have asked his mother many questions. Questions she most probably tried to answer to the best of her ability. Eventually they reach a point where they had no more water or food. They stopped to rest under a bush. **Ishmael tired from the journey, fell asleep.** Hagar decides to leave him because she cannot bear to watch her son die of starvation or thirst. She hides behind another bush, near enough to hear his cries. She feels helpless and alone and begins to cry. Her whole life flashes before her as she faces the possibility of their death!

***And she must have wondered WHERE IS GOD?***

My dear friends Hagar's story: Is the story of all the rejected and abused women. She is the faithful maid that is exploited. The servant used by her master sexually and abused by her mistress, in order to serve their own interest. She represents the girl who has no voice, who is sexually abused or molested by the very people they know and trust. She came from Egypt, so she is the resident in an alien land without any legal rights. She is the pregnant woman who finds herself alone, the wife that is rejected by her husband and partner The divorced mother left alone with her children, who is unemployed, have no more food or water and for whom it seems that there is no future. She represents the homeless woman, relying on hand outs from other people.

Then there is Ishmael story (*Ishmael means God hears*), the story of all vulnerable rejected abuse children, all those children living in orphan and foster homes and those who lives in abusive households. Those who don't know their mothers or their fathers, some who are just longing for someone to love and cuddle them.

But our story goes on. God sees Hagar and Ishmael's agony and pain because in v 17 -18 we read *the Angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her; "what is the matter Hagar"? "Do not be afraid.*

*God has heard the boy crying. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation".*

Hagar cried out to God and God opened her eyes! It seems that this **encounter with God changed everything**. Immediately Hagar realised that she was never alone, God had always been there! From the moment of despair when she felt that she had no more to give and had practically given up on life. It was then that her eyes were opened and she saw the well of water, sustenance for the next part of the journey. This God was the same God Hagar had come to know. The God that Hagar experienced the first time she ran away from her mistress who had made life unbearable for her. This is the God who promised to take care of her and promised that he would also bless her son and he did just that.

To all the Hagar's this morning maybe you are asking. ***Where is God?*** Can't he see how my children and I are suffering? Can't he see how I am abused, and molested and even killed by my husbands, partners and my father?, My sisters God is with you, He sees you agony, you pain, your despair, you are not alone. Don't give up, God is with you in your situation in your circumstances, he will sustain you.

## **CONCLUSION**

My dear friends we are God's hands, eyes and feet here on earth. What are we doing when we know of someone that is abused or when we read of another women being murdered. Do we just think O, it does not affect me

***South Africa has one of the highest incidences of domestic violence in the world. Every day, women are murdered, physically and sexually assaulted, threatened and humiliated by their husbands or partners, within their own***

***homes. Over the past few weeks during Lockdown about 21 women and children were murdered by their partners and fathers.***

On this Father's day I want to thank and salute all men that are wonderful, loving caring husbands and fathers. Thank you to all fathers who encourage, motivate and treat their children (especially their daughters) with respect and dignity. We need more men and fathers like you.

But what about all those men and fathers who are violent and abusive towards their wives, partners, children, other women and girls? What are you and I doing about it? What is the Church doing about it? AMEN