

This story of the casting out of Hagar and Ishmael is a well-known story, but I have to say, it rarely ever gets preached on, at least in my experience. As I was preparing for this sermon, I re-read this story. Y'all, Sarah and Abraham are the villain of this story. Sarah allows her jealousy of Hagar and Ishmael to take hold and she orders them out of her household with nothing more than some water and a little bit of food. And Abraham agrees to Sarah's demands after God shows up and tells Abraham that it's everything will be ok and to do what Sarah asks...Abraham sure lucked out in that department. Maybe the author of this story didn't want Sarah and Abraham to be the bad people in this story, so they added the part about God saying it's ok. I don't know. What I do know is that the heroes of our faith, Abraham and Sarah, do a really terrible thing in this passage. They are human, just like everyone else. What I really want to spend some time unpacking this morning is the central idea of this passage, which is, God hears the cries of the oppressed and shows up in real, tangible ways.

God often shows up in real, tangible ways in our life. I like to call those moments in our lives, God things. In this morning's passage, we get a real God moment, and it comes with a play on Ishmael's name. Did you catch it? I'd be surprised if you caught it. At least, I didn't catch it at first. While no one ever actually says Ishmael's name in this story, in verse 17, God's messenger says, "God has heard the boy's cries over there." Ishmael, in Hebrew, means, "God hears." So, the only time we get the name Ishmael in this story is when God hears the cries of the boy...Ishmael. I love that. God hears the cries of those who are oppressed. It is not enough that God simply hears the cries of the oppressed, God shows up in real ways. God reaffirms God's promise to Hagar and Ishmael that Ishmael will become the father of great nation and then Hagar's eyes are opened by God and she sees a well in the desert. The story of Ismael and Hagar persists in Scripture as a testament that no one is outside of God's promises and grace. God hears the cries of Ishmael and Hagar and shows up in real and tangible ways of grace. We are not alone in the desert places of our lives.

We are not alone in the desert places of our lives. God shows up in our lives in great and small ways. I believe that God things are real. I don't know about you, but I sure could use that reminder now. Going through a pandemic is difficult on everyone, myself including. Admittedly, it is easier on some people, like myself, than others. I have a home with a job and money and food. And yet, there are many people who cannot say the same thing. People are worried and stressed and anxious. People have lost jobs and are struggling to make ends meet. People are dying every day from diseases and violence and the violent racism we see all over the place. Things can seem overwhelming and hopeless. It's not unlike the story of Hagar and Ishmael being cast out into the wilderness with few supplies. And yet, like Hagar and Ishmael, there are God moments in the midst of our despair and hopelessness where God hears our cries and shows up in real and tangible ways. People are coming together to help each other in new ways. Our town has come together in amazing ways during this pandemic. Our food pantry shelves and coffers, once bare and empty, are now overflowing, in no small part because of our congregation. My family, thanks to technology, meets up every week on Zoom to chat, even though we are living all across the country. Our bank was able to write our congregation a check to help during this crisis. Our Synod of Lincoln Trails, which is all the Presbyterian Church in Indiana and Illinois, used a considerable amount of their reserves to send 800 pastors \$200, including to me, right when I needed it. There are so many ways that God shows up in our lives at just the right moment. I was recently reminded of a time in my life when God showed up in my life. I was running late for school one morning and I was driving too fast around a curve and lost control of my vehicle. My car went into the ditch at just the right angle and at just the right speed that I didn't flip over and wasn't injured at all. I really believe God showed up for me in my life at that moment. I don't know why God shows up at certain moments in our lives and not for others. I was reminded about my accident because I saw a news report about a woman who died at the exact same spot last week. All I know is that there is no other way to explain it than God showed up for me at just the right moment. That was just like Hagar praying to God and opening her eyes and finding a well at just the right moment.

This week, I want to hear the ways that God has shown up for you during this time. Where have you seen God in this time? You can leave a comment on this post. You can email me or call me or drop a card in the mail. I want to know about all the ways great and small that God has shown up in your lives. If you are comfortable with me writing them down and collecting them, please let me know. I want to

collect stories from our community about all the ways God showed up during this health crisis. What are your Hagar and Ishmael stories? Where did God hear your cries? Amen and Amen.