

February 20, 2021

Read Genesis 21:1-21

Key verse: Genesis 21:17

And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, 'What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is.

The Personal God

Once upon a time I was a salesman. I never had the desire to be a salesman, but because I was in seminary and I had a family to support I needed a job that offered flexible hours and the potential for some decent pay, so I became a salesman.

And it was one of the most humbling experiences I ever had. Many people who I approached treated me with hostility, sometimes threatening me if I didn't stop talking to them. Even customers treated me as simply "the salesman." Many customers never even knew my name. I was looked upon as a nuisance by many and as a mere means-to-a-personal-end by others.

Hagar must have felt far worse than me. Not once do Abraham and Sarah call her by her given name; to them she's just "the Egyptian slave girl." She is forced to do what she's told, even if that includes conceiving a child for her "master." She is treated so cruelly by Sarah that she runs away into the middle of nowhere. In today's reading, she and her son Ishmael are "sent away" by their mistress and master, into the Wilderness without adequate provisions for their survival. When it appears that her son is going to die, Hagar weeps. Then God speaks.

God calls Hagar by her own name! Though she is a foreigner, though she is a slave, though she is a *woman* (women were treated as men's property in those days), God knows her by name, and *dignifies her* by doing so.

Let us reflect, during this Lenten season, on how our God knows us by name, dignifying us and reminding us that we are beloved and precious in his eyes. Let us also reflect upon those *unnamed* people that we see every day – the landscaper, the delivery driver, the cashiers and the custodians, the people who may need some encouragement, some reminder that they are precious in God's eyes not because of the job they do but because they, like us, are made in the image of God. The next time you go shopping, look for the nametag worn by the cashier and thank that person using their real name. The next time the customer service agent (finally) takes your call, pay attention to their name, remember that they are far more than a customer service agent, and remember that we, as Christians, are called to serve others as they are serving us. Let's take our cue from God and treat people with respect and compassion.

Prayer: Lord God, it's too easy for us to look upon some people as tools for our own satisfaction. Remind us that they are as precious to you as we are. Help us to dignify all people. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.