

WHAT WASN'T SAID

Order of Service (bulletin)

<https://www.spiritofhope.ca/news-and-events>

Video (recorded live stream)

<https://www.youtube.com/@spiritofhopeunitedchurch791>

June 21, 2026

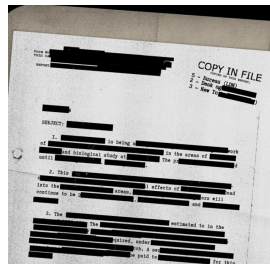
Pentecost 4

Genesis 21:8-14

The child grew, and on the day of weaning, Sarah and Abraham held a great feast. But Sarah noticed the child that Hagar the Egyptian had borne for Abraham, playing with her child Isaac. She demanded of Abraham, "Send Hagar and her child away! I will not have this child of my attendant share in Isaac's inheritance." Abraham was greatly distressed by this because of his son Ishmael. But God said to Abraham, "Don't be distressed about the child or about Hagar. Heed Sarah's demands, for it is through Isaac that descendants will bear your name. As for the child of Hagar the Egyptian, I will make a great nation of him as well, since he is also your offspring." Early the next morning Abraham brought bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar. Then, placing the child on her back, he sent her away. She wandered off into the desert of Beersheba.

Matthew 10:26-31

Don't let people intimidate you. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, and nothing is hidden that will not be made known. What I tell you in darkness, speak in the light. What you hear in private, proclaim from the housetops. Don't fear those who can deprive the body of life but can't destroy the soul. Rather, fear the one who can destroy both body and soul in Gehenna. Are not the sparrows sold for pennies? Yet not a single sparrow falls to the ground without your Abba God's knowledge. As for you, every hair of your head has been counted. So don't be afraid of anything — you are worth more than an entire flock of sparrows.



You probably don't know, but I shortened both of the readings for today... compared suggested in the revised common lectionary for this week. Genesis I stopped at verse 14 where Ishmael and Hagar are walking away from Sarah and Abram's Abraham's property. The Revised Common Lectionary actually carries on all the way to verse 21, telling us what happens to Ishmael and Hagar while they're out in the Beersheba wilderness.

Now, the Matthew reading was really kind of three distinct teachings. They all kind of related to each other, but they were kind of three distinct teachings. And I picked out the middle one. I skipped over the first section which was just a couple verses that talks about the relationship between teachers and learners and how there's a hierarchical expectation. Don't expect to be more than your teacher. The best you can hope for is to be like them. I skipped up the last couple verses, which is a warning about the consequences of not prioritizing your teacher enough. If you don't follow your teacher, well, then

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

bad things are going to happen to you. Don't expect peace and quiet. It's the part in the Bible where Jesus is quoted as saying, "Don't think that I've come to bring peace. I've come to bring a sword." And it's a great passage to preach on. I will do it someday. But it was that middle one that kind of drew me in for what I was wanting to talk about today. Now, it was back in late April, I think, when I did my first round of planning services for these first six Sundays in the season of Pentecost. And I honestly don't exactly remember why I chose to shorten both of the readings for this day, but I'm sure I had a good reason. I'm pretty sure it was probably that I kind of saw something in those sections that really kind of gave me what I wanted to focus on. I don't think I was avoiding the parts that weren't there. I just knew I wasn't going to be relying on them for the kind of conversation I was hoping to have.

Sometimes we do that, don't we? We avoid the things that we just don't want to talk about. And as I got closer to today, I thought about how, you know, sometimes those things we leave unsaid say a lot more than the things we say out loud. And so I kind of, you know, want to challenge myself and us to explore why things are being avoided. Now, I don't think I'm the only one who necessarily feels drawn to an easier path rather than a road less traveled.

Actually, I think I was always planning on talking about the second part of the Genesis reading... that I would have the reading get us to the point where Hagar and Ishmael left and then I knew that I would talk about what happened to them afterward. You know, they've been banished from the home that they knew.

What we heard was part of that story of Abram and Sarah were aware of. Abraham and Sarah know only what happens until Hagar and Ishmael leave. The rest of the story they don't know. They wanted the attention to be only on their child together, Isaac, and not his half brother. So the half brother and his mother had to leave. It's a story about jealousy. It's a story about classism. And it's a story about outright cruelty. Especially when we understand what happens in verses 15 to 21.

The background is that God had encouraged Abraham to leave his family and to resettle in the land of Canaan. His father had brought the family up the courses of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers to the town of Terah and resettled there. And after Abraham's father passed away, he's inspired to carry on a journey down the top and the western edge of the fertile crescent and make his way to Canaan. And the promise was, "Do this, God says, and in that new land your descendants will be a mighty nation." Now, even though God promised that Abram would be the parent of this mighty nation, would have heirs, he and Sarah were childless even after they'd been in Canaan for 10 years. It was Sarah who offered her Egyptian slave as a means for Abraham to have an heir. You know what I'm talking about, right? Yep? You can ask me later. Google it or... I was going to say you could look in the library, but I think those books have been pulled out of the library.

Even before Hagar's child was born, Sarah began to harshly mistreat her even more so than maybe she would have already. She already saw Hagar as lesser. She was a servant. That's why she felt okay with the "I will let you have sex with my servant so you can have a child with her" plan. But Sarah's even more harshly treating her. There's a point at which Hagar actually runs away. She doesn't want to take it anymore. But an angel tells her to return and says, "Name your child when he's born. Name him Ishmael." Which means God listens or God hears. Abraham was 86 years old when

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

his and Hagar's son was born.

Another 13 years go by and visitors to his home tell Abraham that within the next year he and Sarah are going to have a child of their own. Now at this point Abraham is 99 and Sarah (10 years his junior) is 89. No wonder in that story that eavesdropping Sarah is overheard laughing. Laughing was on their minds a year later, when the boy was born. They named him Isaac, which means the one who laughs.

And that catches us up to today's reading where the scene is that Isaac, the child of Sarah and Abraham, has been weaned and is, you know, so a young toddler, you know, a year or so old. And it's 14-year-old Ishmael playing with his recently weaned younger brother and having a great time doing what older brothers should do with their baby siblings. But it's the sight of these two interacting so pleasantly with each other as peers, as brothers on the same level that drives Sarah off the deep end. And she demands that Ishmael and Hagar be banished. Abraham's a little reluctant, but he does it anyway.

So, what wasn't said this morning? The Beersheba desert is harsh. There's no place to refill the water skin that Abraham had prepared for the mother of his first child. And so when they drank it dry, they were out of water. And Ishmael gets to the point where he can barely stand. Hagar is still able to move around a bit. So I'm guessing that the 14, 15-year-old let his mother have more water than he got. And so he gets weaker faster and she leaves him in the shade of a bush where they've come to rest. And she doesn't want to stay there. She wanders off. So she can't really see him there because she doesn't want to have to watch him die. She cries a prayer of lament, and she hears an angel, maybe a similar angel that spoke to her when she'd run away. And the angel reassures her that she and her son have a future beyond this desert. In fact, like Isaac, Ishmael will be the founder of a great nation. His descendants will become known as a people as well. When she wipes away the tears from her eyes, she notices a well. And she goes and draws water and gives Ishmael a drink. And they recover their strength and journey on to a settlement.

Sarah and Abraham probably know nothing about what happened.... This near tragedy that they caused.

The Bible is silent on whether Sarah and Abraham had any other contact with Hagar or Ishmael over the years. It is said that Ishmael ended up marrying a woman from Egypt; from his mother's people.

But there's one verse in chapter 25 in Genesis that says something very interesting to me. It's after Sarah has died, Abraham's remarried, has even more kids, you know, and I don't know how old he is at this time, but you know, take a rest, old man. It's after Abraham dies. Genesis 25:9 says that he was buried in a cave by his sons Isaac and Ishmael.

What's not said anywhere is that obviously these two brothers who got along swimmingly when Isaac was first born kept a connection with each other. What a wonderful piece of the story hidden in a half a verse.

You know, sometimes it's valuable for us to explore what we might have learned in what was not said.

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

There can be any number of reasons why things go unsaid and many good reasons. You know, not everyone wants to open up to others. Sometimes we judge ourselves and we want to keep silent because we're embarrassed about something and we think that others will judge us and maybe we just don't want to expose that piece to someone else.

We all know that abusers and the exceedingly controlling folk often demand silence from their victims. And a lot of bad things happen while things are left unsaid.

Now, some of our unspoken times are simply a product of being part of this rather individual focused society that we're all living in where we don't feel like we want to bother someone with our issues, even our happy things. We prefer not to be bothered by other people's stuff. Sometimes we want to live quiet and peaceable lives alone with our own secrets that we bury deep down. We're conditioned to not brag and also not to pry.

Yet, I firmly believe that (below this surface of silence) a good deal many people crave community and connection. People who long to be empathetic and who long to be understood deeper than a *hey how's it going?* conversation?

Churches have been places where community and connection are part of the fabric of our shared spiritual life. We start our services here at Spirit of Hope with an intentional connection with those sitting near us. We strive not to fall into that trap that was part of that first section of Matthew that I left unsaid where hierarchy is necessary. We don't want to fall in the trap where you've got the caregivers above the cared for below. Healthy caring communities are placing places of mutual care, mutual concern, mutual support and mutual nurture where the caregivers are the cared for and the cared for give care. The caution is that none of this is an excuse to get into the point where we just blow through any appropriate confidentiality. We don't want to be too eager to engage in what might be just simple gossip talking about people saying, "Wow, we're all part of the church. We can chat about so and so. Did you know that they're...?" Sometimes it's really well-intentioned, but sometimes it's not our story to tell yet.

Communities of faith become environments of care when we learn to be proactive. When we seek to experience and to practice listening that sometimes goes beyond what we can hear. And we become empathetic observers that go beyond what we can simply see.

It's mutual care that evolves when we learn to discover meaning between the lines. Meaning in what is not necessarily being said.

Amen.

Singing: #371VU Open My Eyes

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg