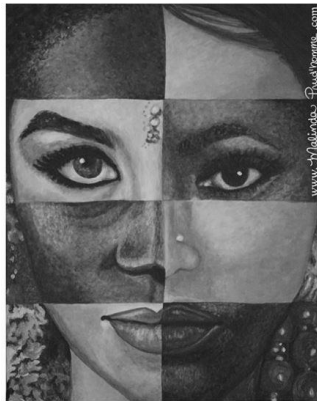


GOD'S PROMISES TO HAGAR



One and the Same, Malinda Prud'homme

We have graciously been granted permission by the artist, Malinda Prud'homme, to feature her artwork, *One and the Same*, in conjunction with the March 12, 2017 bulletin and sermon.

"I'm thrilled to give the Church of Roses my permission to use my artwork, One And The Same, for this one time purpose. It warms my heart to think that my artwork is being used in such a loving and forward thinking way."

Malinda Prud'homme is a Canadian Mixed Media and Portrait Artist living in Toronto. Her greatest passion is portraying a wide variety of female beauty in order to express that ALL women are beautiful; regardless of age, size, ethnicity, or personal style.

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Scripture:

Acts 10:9-23

⁹About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray.

¹⁰He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners.

¹²In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³Then he heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." ¹⁴But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." ¹⁵The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane."

¹⁶This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

¹⁷Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for Simon's house and were standing by the gate. ¹⁸They called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter, was staying there. ¹⁹While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Look, three men are searching for you. ²⁰Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them."

²¹So Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?" ²²They answered, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say."

²³So Peter invited them in and gave them lodging. The next day he got up and went with them, and some of the believers from Joppa accompanied him.

Genesis 21:8-20

⁸The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. ⁹But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. ¹⁰So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac."

¹¹The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. ¹²But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. ¹³As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring." ¹⁴So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a

skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

¹⁵When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. ¹⁶Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, "Do not let me look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. ¹⁷And 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. ¹⁸Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him." ¹⁹Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink.

²⁰God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



GOD'S PROMISES TO HAGAR

There are a number of reasons why I wanted to preach on Hagar today, one of them being that we have a class that we just started this Wednesday on "Loving your Muslim Neighbor."

I thought it would be important for us to remember that the religion of Islam is an Abrahamic faith. There are three Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Islam and Christianity. So it is important for us to remember that we're all connected; we're kind of cousins, if you will.

The other reason I wanted to speak about Hagar is because this Wednesday was also International Women's Day, a day where we remember the importance of women in this world, and the fact that often the role of a woman has been oppressed. Women have been oppressed and held back in a number of ways. Don't get me wrong; I'm very thankful for the amazing women, and many of you that are in this room that have come before me and paved the path for me to even be standing in front of you preaching the word of God. So I hold that day very dearly. And Hagar represents an amazing woman who is often overlooked. She is often overlooked, seen as a distraction from the story of Abraham by commentators, seen as this rabbit trail of the scriptures.

OUR MUSLIM BROTHERS AND SISTERS

Our nation today happens to be in a state of fear it feels like, when it comes to our Muslim

brothers and sisters, and that breaks my heart. So I wanted to tell you the story today of Hagar because she is really the grandmother of Islam. We get to have a piece of connection with this faith through her. She has a lot of firsts in the biblical text and is also the epitome of the foreigner, the immigrant, the slave, the outsider.

She is an Egyptian woman who was taken into slavery, taken from her home and forced to be the slave of Sarah. At the time, if we go way back and get some context in Genesis 16 when it's Sarai and Abram before the covenant is officially taken, she is this amazing woman, this slave girl who has been taken and out of Sarai's own anxiety is thrown into an even more dysfunctional family. Sarai is an older woman who has been promised that she will help bear a nation, and yet she is barren. Out of her own anxiety and desire to control the situation she throws Hagar into a very uncomfortable position of being a slave-wife to Abraham.

Normally in this type of relationship the woman that bears the first son becomes the most powerful wife in the family. Yet, because of this uncomfortable dynamic of Hagar being a slave, Abraham has all power and authority to give the power of the first wife, if you will, to whomever he likes. And he favors Sarah and gives her all of that power.

Now when Hagar gets pregnant, Sarah is livid. Her jealousy overtakes her and she's frustrated and she literally starts to physically abuse Hagar. And Abraham just says, "Do what you want. She's your slave." And he relinquishes all control and connection he has with his slave-wife. Not really the best set up for Hagar.

HAGAR'S COURAGE

Now what is amazing is that Hagar has courage. It takes courage to choose to get out of an abusive situation. It takes bravery as she runs and flees to the wilderness. Out of her own volition she runs and is not seeking for anyone but just seeking for release from this abusive situation. She's a young girl who is pregnant, wandering the wilderness alone. So we're still in Genesis 16; we have a young girl thrown into a very dysfunctional family who is a slave, who is a woman, who is a woman of color and pretty much the lowest rung of any social ladder of her time. And the divine seeks her out. She wasn't looking for the messenger of the Lord; the messenger of the Lord came to her.

HOW DO WE TREAT THE IMMIGRANT?

A big question that we have been asking pretty consistently over the last year or two as certain things have been claimed over television and through our various different social media outlets is: How do we treat the foreigner? How do we treat the immigrant; how do we treat the refugee? I believe that as a follower of Christ that the Holy Scriptures reveal to us ways in which we can engage in the world and God sets an example for how we are to engage in the world.

And there is Hagar! In the beginning of this story the divine seeks out the runaway slave and he says this, "Hagar, slave of pharaoh where have you come from and where are you going?"

Now she never really learned how to complete the answer like you did when you were little, like you start the answer with the beginning of the question. She kind of goes rogue, and answers the question by saying, "I'm running away from my mistress Sarah," which expresses this idea that she has no idea of where she's going, she has no understanding of where her future will be and she just needs to flee which is fitting because Hagar means 'to flee or fugitive.'

THE DIVINE SENDS HER BACK

Now the part that is confusing for me in the beginning of her story is that the divine sends her back to the oppressor, and my heart breaks

because I don't want anyone to be in the hands of their oppressor. I want freedom to come from that. Yet this does two things. As we've said, Hagar was a young, pregnant girl in the wilderness with no future, no supplies, nothing to keep her alive.

So sending her back into the hands of Sarah and Abraham actually keeps her alive. It actually allows her son to also have a relationship with his father, for it was fourteen years before Isaac was actually born. So Ishmael, Hagar's son, was able to have a relationship with Abraham and Abraham was actually able to fall in love with his son.

HOPE AND A PROMISE

Is that the best scenario that I would hope for for Hagar? Not exactly, but it kept her alive, and also the divine sends her back with hope and a promise. The promise is that this son of hers is going to start a nation that is bigger than anyone can count. I believe it says, "You are now pregnant and you will birth a son. You shall name him Ishmael for the Lord has heard your misery. Your descendents will be larger than anyone can count," which is very similar to the same promise that God gave Abraham and Sarah, "That your descendents will be as many as the stars in the sky." She's the only woman in the biblical text that is given this type of promise, a promise that her descendents will start a nation. Come on guys, that's amazing! The foreigner, the slave-wife is the one that is given this promise.

HAGAR IS THROWN INTO THE WILDERNESS

Now we fast-forward to when Isaac is born and the passage that I read earlier and we hear now that Hagar is not voluntarily going into the wilderness, but Hagar is being thrown into the wilderness. I don't know about you, but personally, I have had moments where I felt like

I was thrown into the wilderness. I've had moments where nothing seems to make sense, everything is frustrating. Maybe some of you feel that way about the political scene, and maybe some of you don't; we can still be friends. But we have all had times of wilderness and this is her involuntary time of wilderness. Hagar and her son are out in the wilderness again, not looking for the divine, but again the divine seeks her and says, "Hey, what's going on? Why are you upset?" Hello! We don't have any water, the kid's going to die, and I'm tired. I've been in an abusive family dynamic for the last fourteen years. You said you were going to make a promise. Guess what? Hagar's future is in the wilderness. Hagar's beginning of this nation is in the wilderness. They live in the desert of Paran and she finds her son a wife and it is the birth of the Arabs and from there Islam is created.

THE PROMISE CAME TO FRUITION

I think that means that the promise came to fruition. Huh! So we take a look, we take a moment and think about how God treats the foreigner. Well, in Hagar's situation he blesses her, he shows her compassion, and reveals to us that God's desire for redemption and deliverance and salvation is way bigger than we could ever understand. It is beyond a specific elect line of Abraham because God blessed Hagar's line as well.

God provides an example for humanity to be compassionate to those who are different and considered the minority and considered the foreigner. Hagar proved herself to be an amazing woman of faith, a faith for her future, for the future of her son and for the future of the nation she was promised. Hagar's faith was stronger than Sarah's; it was stronger than Abraham's. She suffered and waited for fourteen years for God's promise to come, and to our knowledge, unswervingly.

As followers of God, we need to follow God's footprints of compassion. When we encounter the stranger, the one who is different, the homeless person on the street, the refugee, the immigrant, the LBGTQ community, we are to bless. We are to persevere through the trials before us and bless as Hagar did. Her blessing

did not discount the life's circumstances that were before her and yet she persevered.

WE ARE THE GENTILES

Often as Christians, we read the biblical text and we forget what side of the story we're on. We're the Gentiles. I heard a giggle, but no, it's real. We're the Gentiles in this story, we are the stranger, we are the 'other,' we are the foreigner. We have the responsibility to express the compassion and grace and forgiveness to all those around us just as it was expressed to us.

**Our faith is not a weapon
to be used for harm or pain.
When it comes to the current events
of otherness around us, we need to
follow the example that God sets by
extending compassion and blessing.**

So the question that we have today for our congregation is how do we continue to do that? We have that flag that is out there to remind people that we are a safe place. How do we as a community continue to be a safe place for those that are considered minority, for those that are considered the foreigner, the outsider, the immigrant, the refugee? That is the question that we get to muddle through, to figure out together. And I'm really thankful to be in a community that is willing to get messy with this question and be uncomfortable sometimes and be frustrated sometimes with each other, but all out of compassion and love for each other, to express God's compassion, love and blessing to those around us. When it comes to the current events of otherness around us, we need to follow the example that God set by extending compassion and blessing. Amen



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