

“Covenant in the Wilderness”

Genesis 21:8-21

4th Sunday after Pentecost

Pastor David Carter CRE

We are staying in Genesis, following Abraham and Sarah, today we discuss the relationship with Sarah and Hagar. I find that these two ladies seem to have some things in common. In biblical times the value of females was based on how many children they could give their husbands. The law at that time was; if no children were born, the husband could take additional wives to bear offspring. This was the life of Sarah; she had been barren, giving no children to Abraham, yet he did not leave her. Some believe it was due to her incredible beauty, I believe it was due to God’s plan. And we have Hagar, an Egyptian slave-girl, given to Sarah as a gift. In a quick overview, both would have been considered as lowly. But, as we know God had a plan for them both, they held a significant part in His plan, and significant in the Bible.

As Isaac was approaching 3 or 4 years old, a feast was being prepared to celebrate his weaning. He was growing and healthy; half of the babies born at this time never made it to this age, so a celebration was in order. During this time, Sarah sees Ishmael picking on young Isaac, mocking and bullying.

Ishmael was around 15 years old and Sarah was not going to allow her son to be mistreated.

Sarah was bothered by this and the threat Ishmael has on Isaac's inheritance, she demands that Hagar and "her son" are driven out. Though this decision (or really this demand) of Sarah was heartbreaking to Abraham, he wants to honor his wife's wishes. But before Abraham sends the two away, he turns to God for guidance. Is there any way Abraham can have them stay and not dishonor his wife. God answers in assurance that Ishmael is a son of Abraham, so he too will be a nation. God says let them go. Abraham then prepares to send the pair into the wilderness.

This is the second time Hagar will leave due to trouble with her mistress, Sarah. Let's look back at Genesis 16 where Sarah has ill feelings for Hagar after she has been with Abraham. Even though Sarah offered the union, she felt that Hagar had contempt for her; she could not stand the sight of her. Sarah did not send her away, she did treat her badly. So Hagar ran away into the wilderness. She was young at this point, about 13 years old and now scared and alone. The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water and asked, "Where are you running from and where are you running to?" Hagar told the angel Sarah was mistreating her because of her time with Abraham. The angel of the Lord then told her to return to her

mistress and submit to her. Next is the important part; in verse 16:10,

“The angel of the Lord also said to her, “I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude.” And then he said, “Now you have conceived and shall bear a son; you shall call him Ishmael.”

Sounds almost like the blessing to Abraham. The name means “God has heard”, and Hagar returns. Just as God named Isaac, “one with laughter”, he also named Ishmael.

So this was the first time Hagar heard the covenant from God that blessed her son, the same one Abraham has been given in chapter 18 blessing Ishmael. As we discussed last week, even though Ishmael was not part of God’s original promise to Abraham and Sarah, he will be a nation.

We now go back to chapter 21. Abraham follows Sarah’s and God’s wishes and sends Hagar and her son out. He supplies her with water and 3 days of food. As she gets into the wilderness, she soon runs out of water and food, she places her son under a bush for some shade, and she moves away about 100 yards. She says she cannot bear to watch him die. She prays and pleads to God with wails and cries. We do not hear about any cries from the child, but as his name implies (God has heard), the scripture reads that the boy’s voice is heard and an angel of God speaks to his mother. He tells her, “do not be

afraid, pick him up for he will be a great nation.” the angel then opens Hagar’s eyes to see a well for her to get water and give it to her son.

Ishmael never speaks in the Bible; he lived in the wilderness of Paran and becomes a great archer. He marries an Egyptian woman and fathers 12 sons who all become princes of 12 tribes. He also has a daughter.

Hagar was abandoned her entire life. First, she was given to Abraham by Pharaoh, and then given to Sarah as a servant, then back to Abraham to mother a child. And once bearing that child Abraham took no responsibility to stand by her. He gives her up and sends her away. Her entire life Hagar seems like a pawn that no one wanted. How fortunate that she was in the home of Abraham and Sarah; they would have taught her about God’s steadfast love and care. So in the end Hagar finds she is loved by God and He has been with her since their first meeting when she was only 13. God seems to find those lost people.

Another of God’s promises fulfilled; a promised made to a lowly slave girl and her son. God chooses who he chooses. No matter who you are, what your place in the world may be. Whether your circumstances are good or bad, God is present, he is watching you, caring for you, He sees and hears you.

The Sheep, the Gate, and the Shepherd

Fourth Sunday of Easter – April 26, 2026

John 10:1-10

By Pastor David Carter TRE

Growing up in the late 60's and 70's, I enjoyed John Wayne westerns. The second reading this morning reminded me of the opening scene of "Big Jake". John Wayne squares off against Jim Davis, the actor who played Jock Ewing on Dallas, over the great Welsh actor Bernard Fox. Fox is about to be hung by Davis and John Wayne is stepping in to negotiate. You may not remember Bernard Fox; he had a 60 year acting career in television and movies; ranging from "Bewitched" and "Hogan Heroes" to "Titanic".

Jim Davis is a cowboy, a cattle man moving cows, steers, and horses across the western landscape. Fox is a sheep herder moving his flock across the same prairie. In the old movies the cattle guys and the sheep herders never get along. And they never called them shepherds; they were sheep herders. The big struggle between the two was that the cows graze on the grass, leaving 4 to 6 inches of green vegetation. This enables the pastures to keep growing as the cattle moves along. The sheep leave less than an inch, and in many cases they tear grass up by the roots; leaving dirt and debris in their wake. That is your 4H class for the morning.

So welcome to the fourth Sunday of Easter, often referred to as, “Good Shepherd Sunday”. Both of our scriptures this morning are Shepherd’s prayers. The Bible is full of them; and a common theme in all of them is an acknowledgement of total trust and dependence on the shepherd by the sheep for protection, food and water, care, and guidance. So as we study the scriptures today, realize that the shepherd is Jesus and we are the sheep.

We are told that Jesus is “the door”. Opened doors allow us to go where we need to. Doors also, offer us protection; we can close and lock them to keep the thieves and robbers out. The reference here is the door to the sheepfold, a pen or structure to keep the sheep in for protection. Some are basic with low stacks of stones and rocks, while others are more elaborate with functioning doors and full roofs. The shepherd is the door even when no constructed door is present. The shepherd can lay in the open part of the wall and become the door; keeping all of his sheep safe from harm. The sheep will not step around him and the wolves cannot get in over him.

Next we learn that the shepherd’s voice is known by his flock, and they will follow his voice. We grow produce down on our farm now, however back in the 70’s and 80’s we had a couple hundred head of cattle. We had to move the cows from one secure field to the other every few days. As a teenager it

frustrated me that the cows could be difficult; and not want to obey, they did not listen to me. However, grandma Mitt could walk through that gate and every animal would stand up, lift their head and follow her every time in whatever direction she went. They weren't sheep, but they knew her voice and that clanging bucket she carried. In the old west the livery stables would not hold the sheep under the stable roofs; they would have a single large pen to keep all the sheep in overnight. Everyone knew when the sheep herders came in the morning, to get their sheep, only his flock would follow his voice. Like today, we all follow the voice of Jesus; he leads us to the green pastures of comfort.

I want to focus on this door idea; with the thoughts of David Guzik, a pastor and writer of history, the sheep are all welcomed in and will receive an abundant life; not an average life, but a great life filled with all of things they need. Does that mean the sheep will have \$200 sneakers on their hooves or have the newest Iphone around their neck? I am not sure if sheep have pockets. An abundant life is one where all of our needs will be provided for and we will be protected. A life filled with contentment. I see pictures of shepherds standing with their flocks, watching, protecting, and caring for all of their sheep. That's the life we all want.

We also need to recognize that this scripture brings in some of the “I am” statements. These are significant because they affirm Jesus’ divine nature and eternal existence. By using this phrase, Jesus equates himself with God’s name. We first see these statements in Exodus chapter 3; Moses is given the task of getting God’s people, the Israelites, out of slavery. Moses asked, “Who am I to go to Pharaoh and demand their release; who do I say sent me, what name do I say?” God says, “I will be with you and you tell them,” “I AM WHO I AM,” directly claiming divinity. These declarations highlight his saving relationship with humanity and his role as the source of life, truth, and redemption. John has several of the “I am” statements from Jesus. They are used to confirm that Jesus is the son of God and with the Holy Spirit, the Holy trinity is completed.

My final thoughts on our scripture are found in verse 11 and 7; that the good shepherd has come to offer a more and better life, one with great abundance. And if we read one more verse in today’s lesson we see, “I am the **good** shepherd”. He says he will lay down his life for his sheep. He is emphasizing the word “good”; not just *the* shepherd or *a* shepherd. He is the good shepherd, meaning he is the protector and provider. In verse 7 we hear, “I am the door” and “I am the gate”, again just

reminding us he is the only way to salvation and eternal life.
The way to God is through His son Jesus.

God is our shepherd and we are his flock of lambs and sheep.
He provides for all of our needs; He leads us to the water and
gives us rest in the green cool grass. We follow where he leads
along the paths of righteousness, prevents us from wandering.
He offers us constant care and continued mercy.

Amen.

“From the Pit to the Providence”

Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28

11th Sunday after Pentecost

Pastor David Carter CRE

We roll into Chapter 37 today to start the next generation in the Abrahamic story. Last week is when we read about Jacob's name being changed to Israel with God's blessing. Verses 1-11 use the old name Jacob and then once we hit verse 12, Israel is used. We have been learning about God's purposes and how none of us, no matter how damaged, can stop those purposes. Today's scripture is no different; we begin to learn about Jacob's sons, and their actions with Joseph, the youngest. Joseph's journey to Egypt did not begin with triumph, but with betrayal. He was hated by his brothers, stripped of his robe, cast into a pit, sold into slavery; but again God's plan could not be overturned by human sins.

Our story opens with family tension; Jacob loved his youngest son Joseph more than any of his other sons. This favoritism flows back to Jacob's rearing; he was favored by his mother and his brother Esau was favored by his father Isaac. So this was a learned response, you should have a favored child. It drove Jacob to steal the birthright from his brother. It drives his sons to want Joseph dead.

The family has settled in Canaan and Jacob's sons are shepherding his flocks. We open finding that Joseph may not be the best of brothers; he is tattling on some of his brothers, telling Jacob they are not doing their job. Then, Jacob gives Joseph a beautiful robe to show his love of his most favored son. Next, the scripture we skipped over is two dreams Joseph had that when their meaning was translated had him reigning over his brothers and his parents. His entire family would bow down to him. This did not improve relations between Joseph and his brothers.

These opening verses display the destructive effects of favoritism in a family. Jacob's special treatment of Joseph created resentment among his brothers. The robe deepened the division. Like Jacob, Joseph in this scripture is at the home in these verses, not with the flocks like his brothers. Maybe because he was the youngest or maybe his father enjoyed having him around.

One time, the brothers are pasturing flocks far away in Schechem. Israel sends Joseph to check on them, he wants word on how everything is. As the eleven brothers see Joseph on the horizon, they decide to kill him and tell their father he was killed by an animal. In this part of the passage we hear the name, "the dreamer", the name they have given Joseph shows their deep hatred. Thankfully, the oldest Rueben stepped up to

say, “let’s not kill him, but throw him in the pit with no bloodshed”. We then learn the brothers sit down and eat; this is a display of their total callousness of their brother. While eating they see a caravan of Ishmaelite traders, and they decide to sell him into slavery. They decide this would rid them of “the hated dreamer” and they would not shed his blood.

“Guided by Faith, Held in Promise”

Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67

6th Sunday after Pentecost

Pastor David Carter CRE

Genesis 24 tells the story of Abraham sending his servant to find a wife for Isaac. It's a story filled with prayer, obedience, Godly direction, and another story of God's promises fulfilled. Sarah had just passed away at the age of 127; the death of one generation moves the promise to a new generation; to fill that promise Isaac needs a wife. Abraham sends his most trusted servant out to find the bride. She must not be from the daughters of the Canaanites, where Abraham and Isaac are living, the servant is told to go back to Abraham's father's family and get one from his clan. Abraham's wishes weren't cultural, but spiritual. He wanted Isaac to be right with God's covenant- No compromises.

The unnamed servant travels to a land he has never been; he is worried that he will not complete the task. So once arriving in the land of Abraham's kin, he heads to the community well. That is where the local ladies gather, men did not draw water. He then prays for success and asks for a sign to know what young lady to choose. The lord revealed that the girl will be, “the one that not only offers you a drink of water, but will also water the camels.” As he finished the prayer, Rebekah comes

to the well. Just as Jacob and Moses met their wives at the local well; the servant goes there to find Isaac's bride. But, this time the servant stands in for his master.

The servant does ask Rebekah for a drink and she then obliges him and offers to water all ten camels. That would have been a huge task; each camel would have taken 10 to 15 gallons of water. After she has completed, the servant offers her golden jewelry, and then asks her about her ancestry-she is one of Abraham's kin. The servant follows that by inquiring if there is room for him at her father's house. Again, he praises God because he knows he has found the bride.

Once arriving at Rebekah's home, the servant explains the situation and his task to her mother and brother. The servant then request that Rebekah leaves with him immediately and travel to Hegev to be with Isaac. The family wanted ten days to prepare for her departure, but the servant wants to leave today. Rebekah confirms she is ready to go with him. She agrees to go to a land that she has never been to, reminds us of Genesis 12 when Abraham and Sarah leave their home. We see a strong, courageous, and faithful young woman.

As they near Neveg, Isaac sees the caravan in the distance and heads to a quiet field to pray and meditate. Rebekah sees the man kneeling all alone, and inquires to the servant, "who is that." She is told it is his master and who she will marry.

Rebekah puts on her veil, and leaps from the camel and runs to Isaac. He takes her to his mother's tent and they are wed. A tent that had been dark and mournful is now full of peace and happiness; Isaac has a wife to love.

The main message in this scripture is that God faithfully guides those who trust Him, uses faithful servants to accomplish His purposes, and blesses willing obedience. The story encourages believers to pray for guidance, develop godly character, remain faithful in their responsibilities, and trust God's direction even when things are uncertain.

The faith of Abraham's servant and Rebekah is inspiring. The challenge is how do we know when the voice of God is speaking to us? How do we know it is the voice of God? Our decisions must be in God's will not just easy and convenient answers. We must choose the ones that honor God's purpose for our lives. We, like the servant, must pray before decisions are made and trust in God to lead us. Like the prayer by the well, God is working before we finish praying. We just need to be obedient and God will handle the outcome.

What begins with prayer will end with purpose. Amen.

"How Long My Lord"

Psalm 13

5th Sunday after Pentecost

Pastor David Carter CRE

We have moved out of Genesis this week, staying in the Old Testament, we are looking into Psalm 13. Several of David's Psalms are lamenting over an enemy or concern that is not named or known. His opening question here is "How long will you forget me, forever?" How long will you not look down upon me? David feels abandoned and alone for some reason.

David wrote this in his late 20s, remember he was anointed to the throne at age 15, in a secret ceremony by Samuel per God's command, and took the throne at 30. From his late teens through his late 20s David had a jealous enemy in King Saul. The king was trying to kill David for years; David was living in caves, lying low in the wilderness, had friends hiding him out. Where did all this begin?

David was a soldier, after killing Goliath, he had gone into battle with King Saul and his army to battle the Philistines. As David and the king were returning home, all the women, from all the cities of Israel would come out singing. Singing, "*Saul has struck down his thousands and David his ten thousand*".

This angered King Saul and bruised his ego, made him jealous. Even though David was better in battle, the notoriety was too much for Saul.

As time passed and a few attempts to kill David were unsuccessful, the king had another idea. He decided that if David would marry his daughter, he could keep tabs on him and easily get rid of him. So he offered his oldest daughter, Merab; but David felt he did not have the status to be part of the royal family as the king's son in law. So he declined. Yet, later when Saul offered his younger daughter, Michal, for a bride, David accepted. Saul advised David he did not need to offer property or gold as a bride price, just 100 Philistine foreskins from battle. Saul was sure that such a battle would be the end of David. But, he was a tremendous soldier in battle and a great leader of men. He returned from that fight with 200 foreskins. This elevated Saul's fear of David; his jealousy had now become fear. The king was realizing that the Lord was with David and he also was gaining favor with the people. Another of Saul's concerns was that his eldest son Jonathan would not get to take the throne as long as David is alive. Jonathan and David were close friends and once Jonathan knew his father wanted David killed, he assisted David to stay alive. Saul was never successful in killing David, so he took the throne after Saul's death.

So after that study from 1st Samuel chapters 18 and 19 we can move back into Psalm 13.

Again, we open with the question, “How long must I wait? How long must I bear this pain?” David believes that God abandons us when trials and troubles persist, and doesn’t even look upon us. “How long must I have sorrow in my heart?” The psalmist asks 4 times “How Long”, in 6 verses. We all have wanted God to tell us His time line. God never left David, it was his feelings, he felt like God had left him. God doesn’t leave any of us.

Sarah and Abraham waited 25 years to have a child,

Joseph was in slavery and prison for 13 years,

Moses wandered in the desert and wilderness for 40 years.

They all were waiting for God’s time.

Four verses of lamenting; “How long?; How long?” Till you will look down on me, till you defeat my foe, till my foe stop rejoicing over my pain and loss. We all have those periods in our lives.

David does trust in his Savior. His solitude brings out a prayerful spirit. He calls out with pleas for help. “Give light to my eyes.” Let me see you and give me strength against my enemy.

David closes with rejoice of confidence in God's never ending love and revels in His salvation. . David remembers God's past righteousness to reinforce his faith; God has cared for us before and will care for us in the future. The love and salvation the future king has know in the past and is sure it will return.

A short Psalm that begins with the four verses of lament and finishes with two strong verses of praise and rejoice.

Isaiah 43:19 says,

"Never lose hope, just when you think it is over, God will make a way for you."

Jeremiah 29:11

"As long as God keeps waking you up, He still has a plan for you."

And Isaiah 43:19

God says, "At the right time, I will make it happen. Not as you expect, but better than you can imagine."