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**The God Who Sees Us
Genesis 16:1-15
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Fridays are my day off, so on Thursday evenings, I usually do something light, something fluff. This last Thursday, I decided to watch a movie I recorded on TV several months called "The Amazing Spiderman 2." I am fascinated by how people become super heroes, and Spiderman is one of my favorites along with Superman.

In this Spiderman story is a character played by Jamie Foxx. This character is a nerdy electrician in a huge company...and nobody ever notices him. He feels invisible and lonely, inventing conversations at home with make-believe friends. He wants to feel loved and needed, and nobody notices him.

Everything changes when he is in an electrical accident and acquires electrical powers. It is when he uses these electrical powers that people begin to notice him and need him. He meets the wrong people who need him, and he turns into Electro, a villain against Spiderman.

Our deepest human longing is to know and be known, to love and be loved. Today we are going to read a story about a woman who was invisible to others, but noticed and seen by God.

Turn with me to our scripture passage found in your bulletin. Before we read our story, pray with me.

Prayer: Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen

This is a story within a story, so some background is needed:

Abraham has received a promise from God that he will have many descendants and become a great nation. His descendants will be so numerous that no one will be able to count them. When God makes this covenant with Abraham, Abraham is 75 years old and he has no children.

Eleven years go by. We begin our passage.

Read Genesis 16:1-6

~Let's stop her for a moment and consider this. Apparently, Abraham and Sarah decided to take matters into their own hands because God was moving too slow (according to their viewpoint, that is). It's a reasonable way of helping God fulfill His promise of a child and many descendants and a great nation. Isn't it? (You know the saying: God helps those who help themselves, which I am sorry to report is not in the Bible.) On the other hand, it was a socially acceptable practice for a barren woman to give a servant to her husband as a lower-level wife.

However, it was not the way God intended.

So, we have trouble in the family of Sarah and Abraham. Hagar becomes pregnant, Sarah becomes jealous, Hagar becomes spiteful. Hagar's status has been raised due to pregnancy, and Sarah's status lowered due to barrenness. As far as anyone knows, Hagar is carrying the Promised Child that will become a great nation.

Sarah takes revenge. We don't know what she did to Hagar, but it was enough for Hagar to flee to the desert...a pregnant woman, alone, forsaken by her husband, no one to look after her, no one seeing her, no one to hear her cry.

Let's find out what happened: Genesis 16:7-15

~There is a sign of hope for us in this story...God rolling with the punches and doing his holy best to make good out of all our bad decision-making. We thwart our Creator, and sometimes very nearly ruin God's holy plan, but God is able to

bring about his larger purposes. The Lord abides over and above all our bad decisions, failures and fights. It's a sign of grace.

Let's take a closer look at what God did in this story.

Hagar was noticed. For the first time, Someone calls her by name. Before, she was always called the slave or maidservant from the mouths of Abraham and Sarah. Now, Someone sees her. Not just in the desert, but every blow Sarah inflicted, every blind eye Abraham turned, every injustice Hagar suffered. The God of the universe and God of Abraham saw it all.

His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches me.

God pursued Hagar. I love the painting on the front of our bulletin of the angel watching over Hagar. There is no indication that Hagar was seeking God. God just showed up and started addressing her by name. Has God ever showed up unexpected your life?

God gives her a promise, but it comes with difficult instructions. "Go back." Hagar is told to go back to her slave situation. It is the last thing Hagar wants to do, but for some reason God wants her to do it.

Has God ever unexpectedly given you instruction that was difficult to hear and receive? Go back and be reconciled with someone. Repay your debt. Forgive. Walk the extra mile. Give away your possessions. Love your enemy. Pray for those who wrong you. Leave your desires and wishes, and follow me. You know the list...most of them from the lips of Jesus.

I know I have told this story before, but it fits here, so bear with me if you have heard it. It was a time when God showed up unexpectedly, at least in an unexpected place, and said something I did not want to hear.

Before I made the career change to go to Seminary, I was struggling with being single. One day, I was complaining to God, feeling sorry for myself, and just in a

funk. I decided to go and exercise at a club I was a member. I was in the weight room about to try one of the weight machines when I “heard “ it.

“Are you willing to remain the way you are for me?” The voice was as plain as day. It wasn’t audible, yet I heard it. I knew where it came from and I knew what God was talking about. God was asking me to remain single for God.

Not what I wanted to hear, but with tears streaming down my eyes, I said, “Yes, Lord.” God saw and heard me that day, and my life was changed.

God saw and heard Hagar. Along with the difficult instruction came a promise: I will increase your descendants so they will be too numerous to count. Do those words sound familiar to you? It is the exact same promise given to Abraham, except now it is given to a woman, a slave, and a foreign one at that, an Egyptian.

God continues by talking about the child she is carrying inside. It will be a boy, and she is to call him Ishmael which means “God hears.” I have *heard* your affliction, God says. Your Creator is aware of what you have been through. Your Lord knows your pain and your frustrations – not only about the wrongs you have done, but knows about the wrongs that have been done to you.

God goes on: the child’s life will not be easy. He will live in hostility with others. People’s hand will be against him and he will fight with others. Not exactly what she wanted to hear, but she is too stunned to pay close attention at this point.

Hagar is stunned by this God who notices her (her gods, the gods of Egypt, would never notice a slave girl). What floors her is not the promised son, or the blessing, or even the suffering. She’s stunned that God saw her, and as a result, she gives God a name: the One who sees me. Hagar becomes the only human – male or female – in all of the Bible to give God a name, and she says, “I have seen the One who sees me.”

I see you, God says.

Hagar is by a well as all of this is happening. As I have mentioned in the past, a lot of things happen near wells in the Bible. It’s a great meeting place, a great pickup

place. God meets Hagar at a well, and even the well is changed by that encounter.

The well is given a name: “Beer Lahai Roi” – the well of the Living One who sees me. It all happened right here – The Creator stepping down into His creation and meeting with a single human being at this specific location at a specific moment in time. Beer Lahai Roi – the well of the Living One who sees me.

Does it remind you of another meeting at a well? There was another outcast woman, who had no real husband, who also met Someone at a well who really saw her. There at the well in Samaria, Jesus noticed a woman who was an outsider. He told her how He could give her water, Living Water.

The Samaritan woman returned, like Hagar, to the very people who wanted nothing to do with her. And we hear her confessing, *“Come and see a man who knows everything about me.”* He saw me.

I see you, God says.

Hagar goes back to her mistress. She is the woman who has been noticed by God, heard by God, found by God, protected by God, her son named by God, and both she and her son are given great promises. God’s saving grace extends far beyond the chosen people of Israel.

The story of Hagar and Ismael does not end here. Ishmael and Hager show up again in Genesis 21. Abraham and Sarah have a child named Isaac, and there is now great tension in the household with the two boys. Which one will the inheritance run through? Both children have been given a promise of becoming a great nation.

Sarah is determined that the inheritance, the promise of a great nation, will not come through Ishmael. She demands Abraham to get rid of the slave woman and

her child. A distressed Abraham does so only after God assures him the boy will be seen and heard and looked after.

Hagar and Ismael are cast off in the desert, and before long, they are out of food and out of water. Hagar lays her son under a bush to die.

The passage says this (Genesis 21:17), “God heard the boy crying...” Remember what Ishmael means? “God hears.” God heard the boy named God hears. And the Lord reiterates his promise of making Ismael a great nation. Not the nation of God’s people, Israel, but a very different one.

And the passage says, “God was with the boy as he grew up.” When we think we understand God, the Lord does the unexpected. You’ve noticed that, haven’t you? Ishmael’s descendants did become a great nation. Muslims claim Ishmael as the forefather of Islam. Muslims believe Muhammad was a descendant of Ishmael.

It’s a stunner, isn’t it? In this story, God sees and hears and works unexpectedly.

Today, God says, I see you. You have been heard. Watch how I will work. So, we cry out to God, to the One who sees and hears, and we watch how God will work.

As Larry, Paul and I sit by the bedside of someone in the hospital, we pray, “Lord, you see and hear.” And then we trust.

As we walk alongside families who have lost a loved one, we pray “Lord, you see and hear. “

As people try to move on after divorce and broken relationships, we pray, “Lord, (say it with me) you see and hear. “

As loneliness or depression sets in, we pray, “Lord, you see and hear.”

As people struggle with physical and emotional ailments, we pray, "Lord, you see and hear."

As we watch loved ones make decisions in their lives with horrible consequences, we pray, "Lord, you see and hear."

As we watch the news and there is more shootings or violence or hunger or homelessness, we pray, "Lord, you see and hear."

I see you, God says. You have been heard.
Amen.