

May 2, 2021 – Online worship, Hagar

Gen 16, 21:1-21

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah – StF 465

O God, you search me – StF 728

Listening God, you hear us – StF 524

Best of all is God is with us – StF 610 (tune: ALL FOR JESUS, StF 341)

==ORDER OF SERVICE==

Call to worship -- BBP

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah – StF 465

Prayer – Jacky Trice (recorded)

O God, you search me – StF 728

Intro to Hagar monologue -- BBP

Hagar monologue – BBP (recorded)

Listening God, you hear us – StF 524

Intercessions – Sylvia Ratcliff (recorded)

Best of all is God is with us – StF 610 (tune: ALL FOR JESUS, StF 341)

Lord's Prayer -- BBP

Benediction -- BBP

## Intro

A few weeks ago Robin Selmes did a creative monologue for us on our online service.  
About the same time, my brother, who is a Methodist minister in Florida

Was preparing for a series of sermons about men and women in the Bible  
And he asked me for some of my thoughts on the women in the Bible.  
I soon found myself digging out several monologues I had written about these women –  
When I read them again, I found they were full of passion and insights  
But I also realized that most of them had been written 20-25 years ago...

When I was just becoming a minister.  
I realized that these stories  
and the living with them which had resulted  
in the writing and telling of the monologues  
had often fed me in my own spiritual journey –  
and, when I had shared them with others,  
they told me they felt fed as well.

I also realized that I have rarely shared these stories since.  
And I wondered why that would be –  
Some have found the stories hard to hear.  
Even my brother commented that, though he's been preaching for several decades,  
And knew most of the stories well,  
Hearing them from a woman's perspective was not easy.  
Over the past few weeks, he and I have been in dialogue about this –  
About how easy it is to give various female characters in the bible labels –  
Prostitute, liar, traitor, 'hag'  
Instead of listening carefully to their stories of how God came to them –  
Even when society had rejected them –  
How God saw beyond the labels attached by those who felt threatened --  
And loved these women – often victims of a blinkered society –  
Into all they could be, all they were created to be.

At the same time, I continue to listen to the stories of women all around –  
Some I know only from news reports or from what I read.  
Others have shared their personal stories with me.  
I feel we are all richer for hearing and knowing all their stories.

Sometimes I've been taken to task for concentrating on the women's stories –  
But sometimes I've felt like that was part of my responsibility:  
To make sure that we hear the stories that have often been overlooked  
Or told from a male perspective.  
That's not to say that a male perspective is not needed,  
But it is not the universal perspective.  
God, in God's infinite mystery, is too large to be understood in only one way.  
We need to hear diverse voices  
In order to hear and understand the God who hears and gives us voice.

And so today, I offer you Hagar and her story, based on chapters 16 and 21 of Genesis.

Hagar, by Bonni-Belle Pickard

Hagar the Hag, they call me:  
The old woman, dried up and useless.  
What they see  
And what God sees  
Are often very different things.  
They see the outside:  
Skin toasted dark from the sun,  
Back bent under the burdens of slavery,  
Face wrinkled from the worries of life  
And motherhood and survival,  
From trials and tribulations,  
But God sees the inside.  
God knows a 'hag' is a Holy One  
For that is what 'Hag' means:  
one who knows the reverence of God  
As a constancy within  
as a brooding presence all around:  
A Hag knows holiness.

It was not always so.  
In my early years I was rebellious enough;  
Little room for rebellion in a slave girl, though.  
I went early to serve in Pharaoh's court.  
He was pleased enough with me,  
Had me groomed for greater duties.  
And then Master Abram came to visit —

Master Abram was a rich man even then,  
The Pharaoh was impressed with this visitor  
from far away  
Even if the visitor had come requesting food  
and accommodation.

Master Abram brought Sarai Madam with him --  
Such a beauty in those day!  
Pharaoh took her in immediately  
and would have had her for his own  
If the Lord had not intervened in a dream:  
God told Pharaoh that Sarai was really Abram's wife!

Whew! There was a storm brewing  
in Pharaoh's chambers then,  
But before anyone quite knew what was happening,  
Pharaoh had shipped off Master Abram  
and Sarai Madam  
And all their flocks and supplies and servants —  
With me among them!

So I came to live in Master Abram's Promised Land,  
As a slave to Sarai Madam.  
Far away from my home, my people, my gods  
Far away...

Sarai Madam was kind enough to me  
in the early days.  
Actually, I was her favorite!  
Sometimes it was almost like I was her friend  
Or her daughter, as she had none of the own...  
We would sit, and she would talk and dream,  
And I would listen and dream my own dreams.

Sarai Madam was always busy with the household:  
Training the servants, watching over the accounts  
And the cooking, the cleaning,  
the entertaining of the guests.  
She had so much,  
and yet all she really wanted was a child,  
Someone to truly call her own.

No one could blame her for that –  
For wanting a child of her own --  
but that is how things changed between us.  
I, who belonged to her by law,  
Would be the one to bear her a child.  
'Her' child, it would be:  
Hers and Abram's,  
To fulfill their longing,  
To fulfill a promise,  
To fulfill an emptiness.

And so Master Abram lay with me:  
The Venerable Old Master  
Laying with me, a slave girl,  
No one asked me, of course,  
A slave girl may be beautiful and fertile,  
But she has no voice.  
At least no voice to question a Master  
Or a Madam:  
A slave is to obey,  
Not to question.  
The Pharaoh and my Master and my Madam  
all taught me that a slave girl  
may not raise her voice against her masters.

A slave girl may not have a voice,  
But her ears may not be so easily stopped,  
And so I would hear much,

Much that would make me question.  
But I would also hear my Master Abram  
speak of his God  
Who he said would speak to him...  
And I would wonder:  
Would a God who speaks also listen,  
Even to a slave girl?

I was soon to find out!  
My body obeyed my master's wishes  
And soon my belling was swelling...  
Sarai's wish became her woe –  
The seed growing within me pushed us  
further and further apart,  
Until the house was not big enough for both of us.

Sarai Madam harassed me then,  
Treated me like a wild animal,  
And Abram did not protest.  
I endured what I could,  
But then I had to leave:  
It was more than I could bear.

I ran to the desert,  
Running blindly toward the sands of Egypt.  
Fierce sun above,  
Running, running, across the burning sand  
Through the sheer vastness of it all.  
Running, running  
Until I found the spring.  
Until I stopped for breath,  
And for water  
And for cool.

It was there that the angel found me that first time,  
There by the pool,  
The pool to which I gave a special name:  
Beer-lahai-roi,  
The Pool of the Living One who Sees Me.

For indeed, God saw me there  
And spoke to me –  
To me! A slave girl!  
God spoke to me,  
Quietly, assuredly,  
And God blessed me  
And promised me that my son would be blessed...

And then sent me back.  
It was strange to go back

But a slave knows how to obey:  
Whether Master or Madam  
Or Pharaoh or God,  
A slave must obey.

I tried again:  
To obey,  
To do my duty,  
To raise a child.  
But things had changed.  
The child that was to be Sarai's  
Now became my own responsibility,  
But the jealousy and anger were still hers,  
And only she could bear them.

My son grew into a fine lad,  
Ishmael, I called him: "God hears".  
Fit and firm, as God had promised –  
'A wild ass of a man.'  
Of course, wild asses don't make very good slaves –  
Even Master Abram could see that,  
Though he, too, loved Ishmael  
And considered him his own.

In time, Master Abram's God heard his plea, too,  
And granted him another son,  
This one by Sarai.

The brothers loved each other,  
But that was also more than Sarai could bear:  
She couldn't stand to see her son  
Playing with the son of her slave,  
So soon she sent us off again.  
And I found myself in the desert again –  
This time with my son.

The sun beat fiercely against the sand  
The water Master Abram had sent with us  
Soon ran out  
And there was nothing left for us.

Ishmael's fine firm body  
Was no match for the scorching sun.  
When he could walk no longer,  
I tried to carry him –  
Though he was much too big for that now.  
And then I lay him under a bush  
And went away.

A mother can bear her own sure death,  
But a mother cannot bear to watch her son die.

The sand had flowed through my fingers before  
Like the days of our lives  
Fleeting, burning, rushing to move on...  
Now my tears made the sand  
Clumped and matted in my hand,  
A lifeless lump... no good to anyone.  
When the tears had spent themselves  
I closed my eyes and prepared to die,  
Obedient to the merciless sun overhead.

It was then that the Lord came to me again –  
There in the scorching desert,  
The God who Sees and Hears and Heeds  
Came to me again,  
And spoke to me.

God lifted me up and opened my eyes  
To the spring of water before me.  
God lifted me up and opened my eyes  
To see my son again,  
And to see the hope that God offered!  
God lifted me up and gave me water,  
Gave me hope,  
Gave me new life!

This, I tell you, is a different kind of God,  
A different kind of Master,  
A different kind of Pharaoh King:  
This is a God who Sees and Hears and Heeds  
And Welcomes and Heals,  
Who Loves and Watches over  
Even a cast-out slave girl,  
Even her fatherless son.  
This El-Roi! The God Who Sees!

Have you met this God?  
Do you know this God who see and hears and help?  
Or are you too comfortable to cry out?

Do you know this God  
Who listens to his servant?  
Do you know this God  
Who cares for those in great trouble?

I am an old woman now –  
A Hag, to be sure,

But a Holy Hag:  
One who has seen and heard and heeded  
The Holy One Who See and Hears  
And Heeds and Helps.

And I will tell you today:  
This God is ready and willing to help you, too,  
Wherever you are,  
Whatever your circumstances,  
Whenever you call for help.  
This God will hear and help you, too. Amen.