



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

January 2, 2011

2nd Sunday after Christmas

Sermon Text: [Genesis 16:1-16](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Genesis 16:1-16](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 148](#)

Second Lesson: [Ephesians 1:3-14](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 1:14-18](#)

Don't Lose Sight of the Unseen God

We Give the Wrong Presents

God Reveals His Presence

One of the interesting things about teaching children at times is seeing yourself in them, seeing the things that you did and the things you did that you thought you got away with. It amazes me how often when I'm teaching kids how they seem to think that just because the teacher doesn't address them being foolish or stupid immediately when they do it that they didn't notice it. It makes me think back to all the things I thought the teacher didn't see that now I'm kind of convinced the teacher probably saw and just decided they had more important things to do than deal with my foolishness at that point and at that time. Sometimes un-acted upon is not the same as unseen. We tend to think that.

Look at what I just read to you about Hagar. Do you think she felt that the Lord didn't know what she was going through? She is put as a servant that belongs to Abram and Sarai into this untenable position, and then she starts to get full of herself because she too is a sinner. Then she has to deal with being abused in some way, we don't know exactly how, by Sarai. You think as she is running away she thinks that this God that Abram was always worshiping was just a bunch of bunk, useless, and she wishes she never would have met those people that worshiped that God because of how they had treated her? When the angel of the Lord appeared to her and came and talked to her, she all of a sudden realized that the unseen God had seen, the unseen God had heard, and the unseen God was acting.

Many times you and I are fools like Abram, Sarai and Hagar. We lose sight of the unseen God and think we are acting, and because he doesn't act to strike us down when we do foolish stuff, we seem to think it doesn't matter. The results of their foolish acts and sinful actions that I just read to you are still a part of the world events yet today. So we have this reminder from our God as we celebrate God himself becoming flesh and becoming seen—don't lose sight of the unseen God.

At times we lose sight of him because we give really stupid, sinful presents to one another, just like Abram and Sarai did. Then at times, in his grace, God comes and reveals his presence to call us back to him.

When Abram was 70, God had come and told Abram that he would have a son who would be the Messiah. Now we are told at the end of this when Hagar had the child, he

was 86, so it had been quite awhile. No child had come. No descendant through whom all the people on the earth would be blessed. Because of that, Abram and Sarai kind of thought “God is not moving on our timetable. We must take things into our own hands.” At least that seems to be what Sarai was thinking. “God has kept me from having a child, so here is the plan. So that all nations on earth can be blessed, you go sleep with Hagar, my maidservant from Egypt. Take her as your wife. Sleep with her. If she conceives, maybe I can build a family through her.”

It sounds really stupid when someone else is doing it, right? You hear what someone else is doing and think to yourself, “What in the world was she thinking? This is obviously wrong.” But be honest with yourself. How many stupid sinful things have you done and rationalized it and made excuses for it and said, “Yeah, it makes sense for me right here, right now,” but if someone else would do it, you would be saying “Boy, what a fool.” You know the kind of thing...“I’ve had such a tough day, day-drinking, that’s a good excuse for me right now. It was such a tough day, I just better have an extra one because I deserve it. I’ve had this tough time. So what if I’m already over the edge. I deserve it. I’ve earned it.” We can make all kinds of foolish decisions when we rationalize our actions. When we lose sight of the unseen God and his will and his ways, we can become convinced by Satan that the unseen God is somehow mean or evil and he’s punishing us and he’s telling us not to do these things because he doesn’t want us to have the fun in life. That’s one of the great lies of Satan.

We give each other these presents at times that are just sins because we are sinful and we are foolish and we don’t cling to God. We cling to ourselves. We cling to what we can see. So we do things that when our neighbor does it, we say “What an idiot.” And when we do it, we say “But you have to understand.”

What happens isn’t that hard to understand or predict, is it? Hagar becomes pregnant. She looks down at Sarai. “I’m pregnant by Abram. You’re not. You’re the problem. I have the favor of your God. You don’t.” Hagar evidently acts in such a way that Sarai can notice it. Sarai is not happy. So what does she do? What every sinful spouse does...blame their spouse, right? “You’re the one who brought this all about. You’re responsible for the wrong I’m suffering. I put my servant in your arms. Now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me.” Well the Lord does judge between both of them. It says they are both sinful fools.

Then you see the present that Abram gives...“You’re servant is in your hands.” Not correcting his wife, not saying “Maybe we all did something wrong here and maybe we all should just repent and say ‘Lord have mercy on us for our foolishness and our sinfulness.’” Instead he says “Leave me alone. It’s your problem. She’s your servant. Do to her whatever you want.” His present is “Here is my headship as a husband. I’m just going to kick it over here. Do whatever you want. I don’t really care. Just leave me alone and quit nagging me.”

So he gives this wonderful present that leads to more problems. She starts doing whatever, mistreating Hagar. That's a pretty wide open sentence, isn't it? Who knows what that all involved, but I'm pretty certain it involved sin. So one present leads to another sinful present which leads to another sinful present and leads to Hagar running away and saying "I wish I never would have met those people that worshiped the true God. They've been nothing but a curse to me."

The scary thing is to stop and think, in our lives, have we ever done that to someone who is not a believer, someone who is a weak believer, someone who is a smouldering wick? Next week we'll hear about "the servant of the Lord will not put out that smouldering wick." Have we ever snuffed out that smouldering wick, that weak believer, and push them away and they viewed us as the representative of the true God, the Savior God, and by our actions, by our sins, have we ever pushed them away? If you are honest with yourself, you probably have done something along those lines, haven't you?

All of a sudden you kind of realize, as foolish and sinful as Hagar and Abram and Sarai are in what we just read, they're not much different than you. They're not much different than me. We have failed our God in countless times. We at times have taken his call to be light to the world and said, "No, we just want to be light to ourselves. The rest of them, they can just go to hell." We don't really care that much about them because we are proud of what we do, and we neglect the rest. There isn't a whole lot of difference between us and Abram and Sarai.

When we come to that realization, when we quit making excuses about who we are and what we are and we see how we have failed our God so blatantly, then it becomes important for us to see what Hagar saw. The angel of the Lord for the first time appears in the Old Testament. The angel of the Lord, I believe in this case and in many other cases, is the pre-incarnate Christ. The second person of the Trinity, before he was born in Bethlehem, appears to Hagar. The one whom she considered unseen and unhearing and uncaring about her plight, in his grace and mercy appears to her. He appears to her to assure her that he knows what is going on and he sees and he hears. He tells her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." She's still a sinner. Yet he tells her to go back and submit to her. Then he tells her, "I will increase your descendants. They will be too numerous." But he also brings this news that's not so great either. The result of all their sinful actions says that this guy is going to be a wild donkey of a man. His hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him and he'll live in hostility toward all his brothers. You can see that yet today when you look at any news events of the Middle East.

There were results of their sins. There were consequences. But that doesn't mean that God didn't know what was going on. God was still accomplishing his purposes. The amazing thing is that Hagar doesn't whine about what would happen to her son. She doesn't whine about going back. Instead she says, "You are the God who sees me, for I have now seen the one who sees me." So she calls the place "the well of the living one who sees me." That's the translation of that strange Hebrew name I read to you.

Then she gives the name Ishmael to her son, which means “God hears.” So every day when she thought to herself “God doesn’t know what I’m going through” and she had to say “Ishmael, come here,” she would be reminded that God hears and God knows what she is going through. She is not alone. That God who had promised to bless all nations through, not her child but Abram and Sarai’s son, that same God would be with her, and that God sees and hears her.

Here is the truth of the matter...God reveals his presence also to us. Not as the angel of the Lord. He reveals his presence to us in his Word, in his Sacraments. He reveals his presence to us as we rejoice in his Word and as we celebrate his Word. He reveals that he is a God of grace and mercy but a God who is just, a God who punishes sins, a God who tells us that he has punished each and every one of our sins. He tells us that. He tells us that the reason the baby was born in Bethlehem was so that he could die on the cross of Calvary and then rise from the tomb to assure us that our sins are paid for. He sees our sins. He sees what they deserve. Then he pours out his cup of wrath on himself instead of on us. This is the amazing thing about our God. The unseen God sees. And he acts. He acts in ways and in times that we don’t always understand.

You and I stare at the microwave when we are heating up something thinking that is going to make it go quicker. We have no patience whatsoever. Here they are having to wait 10-15 years, and then they finally get impatient. You and I get impatient so much quicker than that. But our God is acting, and he acts in his timetable. He calls us just to do what he calls us to do...to be faithful to him, to share his Word, to reflect his truth, not just with each other but with the world. That is what he has put us here for.

He doesn’t call us to see the results. The unseen results are in the hand of the Holy Spirit who does the work. We are just his hands and his feet. We are just his voice. We are the instruments that he uses. But that means we need to know his Word and share his Word so that the unseen God can be seen by those who don’t know him now, who right now are destined for hell. That’s the task your Lord has given you. Don’t lose sight of your task. Don’t lose sight of the unseen God.