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Proper 7
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For me, it was one of the most important and most difficult revelations that came from beginning to seriously study scripture. The understanding that what we had been presented with as pure sacred Gospel has in actuality been shaped by human minds and human political forces. History, it seems, even biblical history is shaped by the winners. It is the victor who gets to do the final rewrite of what happened. It is the victor whose viewpoint gets told. This is as true in the telling of the stories of the history of our faith as in any other part of history.

The temptation at first is to either be completely disheartened by this knowledge or to refuse to believe it. But there is another alternative. We have the opportunity to learn to see the story of faith with new and clearer eyes.

Eyes that invite us to delve more deeply into the story and to hear not just what the writers intended us to hear, but even more deeply and importantly what God may be inviting us to hear for our own day and our own world.

Have you ever noticed how in the news even when people are claiming to be unbiased and just objectively report what they think is going on...it never quite comes out objective?

One of the great revelations of 20th century philosophy was the realization that there's no such thing as unbiased reporting. We can only see through the eyes we have. We can only report through the words we possess and everywhere along the way it is inevitable that our own constructs of reality will shape what we see and hear and say. Well I, Hagar, may have lived thousands of years before Heidegger but even back then I could have told you that.

For thousands of years now you have been hearing the story of my life as if there were only one version to that story. But today, today I will tell you, it looked pretty different from

where I was sitting! There's no doubt that Abraham was a genius, a shrewd genius. But Abraham was also an opportunist and a fool! I was his slave. No point in trying to pretty that up by calling me his slave wife or anything else of the sort. I was his slave, his property, there for his use as he chose. When he needed a son and no son came, I was pressed into providing one.

You should have heard him then, walking around with the child in his arms showing off, bragging about his virility, acting as if this infant, this newborn child belonged to him and him alone.

I knew as long as my son lived and Sarah remained barren, I would belong to Abraham. At least as long as the child still needed care, and so I prayed that the bond between me and Ishmael would be strong. So strong that Ishmael might find a way to protect me from the dangers inherent in being any man's slave. As long as Sarah was barren, we were safe. We were fed. We were needed. And for that brief time, I thought myself to be valued by Abraham. But I over estimated my worth.

I know he blamed it all on Sarah. Yes, "She made me do it!" Where have we heard that before? When the day comes that women can write their own history books, what will they say then? Whose bad idea will it be then? But I know better. I watched as he changed. The same Abraham who once proudly walked the streets of the village showing off my son now had a new focus of his pride. He claimed God had given him this son Isaac. Well you tell me, who else had given him his first son? Do children come as gifts from anyone besides God? And yet he

convinced himself that one son mattered and one did not. One son was the true heir. And I watched in horror as Ishmael went from being the child of his loins to the child of his slave woman.

He claimed it was Sarah's doing, but what reason do I have to believe that? This powerful man, head of his tribe...he could do as he pleased. And he did. Saying it was God's will, he threw us out of the village like garbage thrown on a trash heap...a woman and a small child left to find for themselves in the desert. Now does that sound like God's will to you? To leave a beautiful healthy child to die of sunstroke in the desert?

It is amazing to me how often God's will matches the whim of the most powerful person in the story. God wants me to overrun your land and make it my own. God wants me to take you as a slave. God wants me to father a child with you. God wants me to build a fine palace and a fortress with a high wall that my enemies cannot breach. It's as if God's will were the trophy given at the end of the Superbowl! Oh you've won...so you get to decide God's will.

But I know better. I know because I learned that day in the blistering desert heat who God is. God came to us that day, not Abraham. I learned for myself that day that it is God's will that all should live, even a worthless slave and the child of a slave. It is God's will that the evil intentions of the mighty and the powerful be thwarted. It is God's will that the smallest, the weakest, the lowliest be fed and protected and honored as long as this earth abides. That is the real lesson of the desert. It is not the story of God's blessing a ruthless cruel hearted father. It is the story of God preserving two young, innocent, and vulnerable children.

I tell you, if you want God's blessing on your life, take your history with a grain of salt. Don't align yourself with the mighty and the prosperous. But walk out into the desert with the

powerless and the vulnerable and together with them, wait and hope for the coming of God.

There in the heat of the desert at the edge of your own death, that's where you will find God waiting, waiting to guide you to a cool, clean, life giving spring.

I cannot tell you how Abraham and the God of Abraham and Isaac were reconciled after what he did. I can tell you that the God of Hagar and Ishmael never left our side in the desert and God waits there still for all those whom the world has ignored, rejected, or forsaken. If you don't believe me, then ask Jesus of Nazareth. See what he tells you.