

LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS  
PROPER 7A  
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**Genesis 21:8-21**

**Psalm 86:1-10, 16-17**

**Romans 6:1b-11**

**Matthew 10:24-39**

**Genesis 21:8-21**

This lesson from the Hebrew Scripture is evidence of God's ever-wide mercy for all people – even people who are different from us! At the urging of Sarah, his wife, Abraham has fathered a child through Sarah's slave Hagar who was an Egyptian woman. It was customary, when a woman was barren, as was Sarah, to offer her slave for the purposes of producing offspring. But, as we know, some men had visited Abraham and promised that Sarah would produce her own child and indeed she did – Isaac! Isaac and Ishmael grew up together and played together as they were doing in the beginning of today's story. Sarah is not happy about this and her unhappiness and bitterness transfer to her slave, Hagar. She implores Abraham to send Hagar away. Abraham is reluctant to do accede to this harsh request, so he consults with God. God instructs him not to worry about Hagar and Ishmael, but to do as Sarah requests. So Abraham sends them away after first providing them bread and water for the journey. But as Hagar wanders in the wilderness of Beer-sheba, the provisions run out and she and the child face death. Unable to bear witnessing the death of her child, she places him under a bush and turns her face and begins to weep. The angel of God visits her and makes her a promise that both she and her son will live; and that from her son, a great nation will spring up. God then leads her to a well of water with which she quenches her son's thirst. The lesson today ends with the claim that "God was with the boy, and he grew up." He goes on to marry a woman from Egypt and produce the nation that God promised. ***We live in polarized times, where we expect that there will be winners and losers. If God promises Abraham countless offspring through his own biological son, Isaac, then he can't possibly promise the same thing to a son produced by a slave girl! And yet God's mercy is abundant enough for everyone to live the promise. What would it look like in your world for you and people like you to live God's promise? What would it look like for people who are different from you also to live that promise? Is there room in God's idea for everyone to live the promise?***

**Psalm 86:1-10, 16-17**

***Have you ever felt as desperate as you imagine Hagar must have felt in the story above? To be deprived of the means to continue living and to continue providing for your family...to be so at the end of your rope that there is nothing left but to turn your face and weep? Do you remember such a time in your life? Reflect back on that time, and pray this psalm. God listens to the cry of the poor.***

**Romans 6:1b-11**

In order to be able to live into God's promise, we have to be able to let go of the things that prevent us from doing that. In this section of Paul's epistle to the Romans, we are encouraged to let go of the life of sin and to walk in newness of life. Paul reminds us that our life of sin was put to death in Christ through our Baptism. Our old self was crucified with Christ, and we are freed from sin. Because of this reality, we now have a foretaste of Resurrection. We are free.

***To what unhealthy ways do you cling? What would it be like to set those ways aside and live as if you are not controlled by sin? Through God's grace you are free to do that now, you know.***

### **Matthew 10:24-39**

In today's Gospel, Jesus continues giving instructions to his disciples for mission. What at first seems like a disjointed collection of statements, can actually be divided into three sections which amount to a three-fold design for living: ***Have no fear. Put me first. Find your life.***

First, ***have no fear.*** Jesus understands that his disciples are facing difficulties and that there will be obstacles and persecutions for those who follow Him. He reminds them that every evil that now hides in darkness or secrecy will be brought to light and destroyed. He reminds them that his message is to be proclaimed boldly and that his followers are meant to walk in the light. He reminds them that they are more valuable than even the smallest, most beloved part of God's creation. Secondly, Jesus reminds his disciples to ***"put me first."*** Devotion and commitment to Jesus is priority one. Disciples must not be afraid to acknowledge Jesus; neither should they hesitate to keep their focus on Jesus as opposed to others. This does not mean that others should not be honored or served, but they should be served with an eye toward Jesus and his designs for the kingdom. Choosing to serve and follow Jesus in this way will sometimes put us at odds with our families or with other commitments. But if we prioritize Jesus first, even though divisions exist, God will be with us and will align our lives with His will. And finally Jesus reminds his disciples to ***"find your life."*** Following Jesus can be scary. Taking up one's cross is often a one-way path of suffering. But the end result is life – life abundant. God was with Ishmael and he grew up. God was with Jesus and He rose from the Dead. God will be with us and we...

***Have no fear. Put me first. Find your life. The only way we can do this, however, is to ask for God's grace to enable us to live without fear, to seek His will first in all we do and to expect that we will find life. Can you make a commitment this week to remind yourself of these three things every morning when you start your day? We might be surprised at where God will lead us.***