

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
June 21, 2026 – Proper 7
The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church
Los Alamos, New Mexico

Genesis 21:8-21
Psalm 86:1-10, 16-17
Romans 6:1b-11
Matthew 10:24-39

Some years ago during a time of great turmoil in this diocese, our Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori came to Clergy Conference. Our Bishop Jeffrey Steenson had resigned and swam the Tiber to the Roman Catholic Church. The Most Reverend Jefferts Schori sought to console us but unfortunately was met by several who shook their Bibles at her and declared the need for spiritual warfare. She calmly responded: “I worship the Prince of Peace.”

That does not seem to be the Jesus we hear in the Gospel today:

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth;
I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.
For I have come to set a man against his father,
and a daughter against her mother,
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;
and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.”

What better introduction to the never-ending family dramas of the first book of the Torah – Genesis, which gives us reassurance and multiple witnesses that the tree of life has many branches.

This is Father’s Day, and Genesis is a lot about fathers. In particular, we hear today of Father Abraham. In this reading, his name has not been changed from Abram. It’s early in the story, but there has been a divine promise: Abram was told by God. that his descendants would outnumber the stars in the sky.

Last week the Genesis story told of the greeting of three angels at the Oaks of Mamre and the prophecy that Abram and Sarai would have a child. And we hear the angel proclaim: “Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?”

However, the story begins several chapters before when Abram complains to God that he has no children and a man born in his house was to be his heir. God reassures Abram he will have a son.

Some time passes and Abram's wife Sarai, who has not yet been promised a child, decides to take matters into her own hands and offers up her Egyptian handmaid to bear an heir for her husband.

(It's interesting to note that though the handmaid is identified, neither Abram or Sarai address her by name.)

The problems start when the handmaid conceives and starts acting uppity to her mistress. An enraged Sarai obtains Abram's permission to take her in hand. Sarai treats her handmaid so harshly that she flees into the desert.

An angel of the LORD finds her and addresses her directly:

“Hagar, Sarai's maid... “Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand.”

And then Hagar is given a promise that resonates with the covenant to Abram:

“Behold, you *are* with child,
And you shall bear a son.
You shall call his name Ishmael,
Because the Lord has heard your affliction.
He shall be a wild man;
His hand *shall be* against every man,
And every man's hand against him.
And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.”

And Hagar gives a new name to God:

“El Roi - You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said,
“Have I also here seen Him who sees me?”

Hagar believes the Angel of the LORD so she returns to service and in the fullness of time bears a son, who is named Ishmael, which brings us to the drama of today's reading.

Sarai sees the children playing together and will have none of it:

“Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac.”

This perplexes Abram for he loves both his sons, so it would almost seem that the verse of the Psalm would come from the mouth of Abram.

Turn to me and have mercy upon me; *
give your strength to your servant;
and save the child of your handmaid.

And, indeed, Abram pleads for first-born his son and his mother.
So God promises to Abram they will be saved.

If we remember what has yet to pass in the Scriptures,
we discover parallels in Genesis with the book that follows, Exodus.
What goes around, comes around.

The nation of Israel will grow
but eventually will migrate to Egypt during a great famine
only later to be oppressed by the Egyptians.
In this earlier drama, it is Hagar the Egyptian
who is oppressed by the ancestors of what would become Israel.
In both cases, Hagar and Ishmael and the Hebrews
will find themselves in the wilderness.

The angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar?
Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy
and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.”

And the Lord fulfilled the promises
to build great nations of the sons of Abram:
Isaac became the father of Israel
and Ishmael became the father of the Arabs.
Isaac and Ishmael, childhood friends, will not meet again
until they come together to bury their father, Abraham,
who at 175 died “in a good old age, an old man and full *of years*,
and was gathered to his people” not far from Mamre,
where the Lord promised him the future.

As recorded in the genealogy of Matthew:
“So all the generations from Abraham to David *are* fourteen generations, from David until the
captivity in Babylon *are* fourteen generations,
and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ *are* fourteen generations.”

And as Jesus says in the Gospel of John:
“And other sheep I have which are not of this fold;
them also I must bring,
and they will hear My voice;
and there will be one flock *and* one shepherd.”

The tree of life has many branches but one root,
the God of our ancestors, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, for he is the Christ,
the anointed of God,
the Father and Mother of us all. Amen.