

# Faith United Church of Christ

*“An inclusive spiritual family shaping a better you for creating a better world.*

*A place to make a difference.”*

June 25, 2017

Sacred Fellowship 10:45 a.m.

*We are delighted that you are here today! We hope you will find us an affirming, uplifting, and committed family of faith. Here we work to make everyone, without any exceptions, to feel accepted, inspired, and encouraged in their spiritual journey. In dialogue, we seek to understand. In encouragement, we seek to heal. In all things we yearn to live by love, for peace, with joy. This is a place where your intellect will be challenged, your heart will be nurtured, and your spirit refreshed. Varying beliefs are expressed openly and freely, and your doubts will not be suppressed. We trust that we are all, every person and part of creation, continuing to be blessed by God's grace; and that in community we can help each other to see this grace alive in our lives and relationships. We hope to share our gifts with you, even as we pray that you will want to share your gifts with us. Whoever you are and wherever you may be in your life's journey, we invite you to be a part of our lives and our spiritual home. Welcome!*

## **POINTS TO PONDER**

“God dealt with Sarah as God had said, and God did for Sarah as God had promised.”

— *Genesis 21.1*

“Many take comfort in God's faithfulness to Sarah, but one wonders about where faithfulness and promises should end when the person becomes abusive and vindictive towards others, as Sarah was. One also wonders why God, in this story, was not as faithful to Hagar – Sarah's slave. When we say God is faithful to some, what does that mean for those whose lives are not as blessed?”

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 6/22/2017*

“But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with (*perhaps: “mocking”*) her son Isaac. So she said to Abraham, ‘Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac.’ The matter was very distressing (*lit. “evil”*) to Abraham on account of his son.”

— *Genesis 21.9-11*

“In the midst of her jealousy Sarah loses her moral compass, becoming physically and psychologically abusive. She distances herself from her favorite slave and from her surrogate son. She dehumanizes them, and then concludes that there is no room for Hagar and Ishmael in her life with Abraham, and she tells him to turn them out to die in the desert.”

— *Rev. Dr. Laurinda Hafner at ucc.org*

“God said to Abraham, ‘Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you....’ So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.”

— *Genesis 21.12, 14*

“How could Abraham not be distressed? Not only for Ishmael, his son, but also for Hagar, his wife? Here we're told that God speaks of these two beloved people to Abraham as ‘the boy’ and ‘your slave woman’ – reducing them as commodities rather than members of the family. It is as if Abraham is being told, ‘You have Sarah and Isaac, so you don't need Hagar and Ishmael; so just throw them away!’ Ishmael is 17 y.o., and was for 14 years his only hope for progeny and carrying on his legacy. Sarah treated Hagar cruelly for at least 17 years, and Abraham let her do it; but isn't enough, enough? Kicking them out of the family? Offering no inheritance, and no helpers or sufficient provisions for safe passage? Effectively giving them a death sentence? Is this not simply beyond all ethics? And God would really just have him to abandon them to the desert, and think nothing of it?! Only a sociopath could be so heartless. Today, we could call such behavior spiritual, ethical, and psychological abuse. It is simply unacceptable to believe that God sanctioned this, much less instructed it. Believing our God would do such a thing legitimizes the possibility that we could do the same thing ourselves. But if it is abominable for us to do, how much worse is it that our God, the epitome of our highest values, would do such a thing? It is our moral and spiritual duty not to accept the prejudices of those in ancient cultures who justified discrimination and death towards those who were foreigners and slaves. If we are to read the Bible honestly, we must not filter it through the lens of, ‘If God approved it, then it must be OK,’ for such thinking has justified the most despicable actions in religious history. We have to ask ourselves whether it was really God speaking and acting, or rather the cultural presumptions of a fallible author that did not consider that people many millennia later would be reading his words.”

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 6/22/2017*

“When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, ‘Do not let me look on the death of the child.’ And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept.”

— *Genesis 21.15-16*

“In that wilderness the inevitable happens. The bread and the water run out. The young boy Ishmael starts to die of dehydration. Hagar will eventually die too, but Ishmael is going to die first, in her arms. As the crisis approaches, Hagar cannot bear it. Are there more tragically poignant words than hers: ‘Do not let me look upon the death of my child....Let me not see or hear his dying?’ Hagar's suffering, her desolation, pierces my heart.... Hagar is cast out, abandoned by the very ones she had trusted, the ones she had put her faith in. Left waterless in a desert where her little boy Ishmael lies dying, she weeps bitter tears of hopelessness. Sometimes, tears are the only prayer we have left. Hagar's last drop of hope has evaporated in the desert heat.”

— *Rev. Dr. Laurinda Hafner at ucc.org*

“Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand.... Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink.”

— *Genesis 21.18a, 19*

“As difficult as it would be to watch your own child die of dehydration in the desert, it would be even harder to not be there with your child to hold and hug, and offer whatever soothing words that a parent could imagine in such a circumstance. Whether her embrace and words eased the pain and

sense of futility or not, she at least tried to extend loving-kindness to her son in what she took to be his dying moments. In the end, only our love really matters. That we loved, and that we refused not to love no matter the situation; that is what gives our lives purpose. And maybe, just maybe, our love might help others to see that their lives had meaning in our eyes. This love was the “well of water” that she found, and then gave; it was the life-giving water that saved them and freed them.”

— Rev. Bret S. Myers, 6/22/2017

## CALLED TOGETHER AS SPIRITUAL FAMILY

### **Welcome and Announcements**

*Please sign the registration pads at the ends of the pews on the center aisle.  
We ask that you please shut off cell phones and practice quietness during the service.  
Please join us for fellowship and refreshments after the worship  
in Romig Hall (lower level of elevator or stairs).*

\* = You are invited to stand as you are able

### **Prelude**

#### **Welcoming the Light of Love in Our Midst** *(acolytes light altar candles)*

*We prepare ourselves for communing with the sacred as love's light is brought into our awareness. The light of love burns within and among each of us, and we carry that light into our sanctuary; visually reminding us of the image of the divine that lives in our hearts, minds, and souls – and that we nourish through our faith-filled fellowship.*

### **Affirming God's Presence in Us All**

“You Matter!”

### **Sharing Christ's Peace**

*As a sign of our reconciliation with God and one another, greet and welcome those around you and share “the peace of Christ.”*

### **\*Centering Our Souls**

O God, creator of Hagar and Ishmael, as well as Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac:

**Your presence to all peoples, and all generations, has been a source of inspiration.**

And yet we, like our spiritual ancestors, have often drifted astray from the life that you would have us to live.

**As a people, throughout history, we have used your name to justify prejudices, abuses, and dehumanization of others to satisfy our own interests.**

We have cast out or ostracized the Hagars and Ishmaels, stripping them of their rights, their assets, and their humanity.

**Beckon us to your paths of justice, peace, and love once again that we may see in each other, no matter our differences, our brothers and sisters – your children.**

Remind us as you did Abraham that we are to, wherever we may go, be a blessing to the nations and those in our midst.

**Instruct us how to be the wells of water for those who are roaming the deserts of life. By our love, may we quench their spiritual thirst, and sate their physical hunger. May it be so; now and always throughout our lives.**

**\*Hymn of God in All Our Living**                      “God of Abraham and Sarah”                      **#20**

**Our Stories of Random Acts of Kindness & Intentional Deeds of Compassion**

**WE LISTEN FOR THE SACRED IN THE MIDST OF OUR LIVES**

**A Time for All God’s Children**

**Prayers**

*Sharing Our Joys and Concerns*

*Silent Meditation: The Prayers of the People*

*Pastoral Prayer*

*Unison Prayer*                      *“Prayer from the New Zealand Book of Common Prayer”*

Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver, Source of all that is and that shall be, Father and Mother of us all, Loving God, in whom is heaven: The hallowing of your name echo through the universe! The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world! Your heavenly will be done by all created beings! Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth. With the bread we need for today, feed us. In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us. In times of temptation and test, strengthen us. From trials too great to endure, spare us. From the grip of all that is evil, free us. For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and forever. Amen

**\*Hymn of Wonder at Human Injustice**                      “O God, My God”                      **#515**

**Scripture Lesson**                      Genesis 21.1-21

**Message**                      “The Well In the Desert of Life”

**\*Hymn of the Oasis of Faith**                      “In Solitude”                      **#521**

**WE DEDICATE OURSELVES TO GOD’S SERVICE  
THROUGH FAITHFULNESS**

**Giving of Our Tithes and Offerings**

*“Generosity arises from gratitude like heat arises from fire. Like fire, gratitude is lovely to see; but when it warms others with generosity, that is when it becomes a true blessing.”*

**Offertory**

**\*Song of Dedication**

*Tune: Old Hundredth; p. 7*

The light of love does shine most bright when all are siblings in our sight;  
We are one fam’ly on this earth; we are God’s children from our birth.

**\*Unison Prayer of Dedication**

By the Spirit’s inspiration, we give of what we have that your blessings may abound and that goodness may flourish. Instill in us a spirit of generosity that we may do our part to help all who are in need. Pour out your Spirit upon us that we may envision one world, the world of all of Your children. Let our lives be a testimony of the unifying nature of your love to all that we meet along our life’s way. Amen

**Encouragement for the Journey**

*“Seekers Benediction”                      from Seekers Church, Washington, D.C.*

Go into the seething cauldron of the world.

Listen for the questions and voices that you would rather not hear.

Answer them with the energy of the Holy Spirit,  
the power of the One who gives us life,  
and the boundless love of Christ.

**Postlude**

**\*The Light of Love Goes into the World**

*Love’s light is not extinguished from our worship, but is transferred from the flame of the candles to the passion in our hearts that we may go forth to let the light of love shine through us as we go to serve in the world!*

**WE GO FORTH AS PEACEMAKERS  
TO CREATE JUSTICE FOR ALL**

*Our worship is fulfilled, and our purpose is confirmed,  
through our service as God’s stewards to the world and all creation.*

*Use the blessings God has given you as you share  
the joy in your heart, the wisdom in your mind,  
the love in your spirit, and the peace in your soul.*

*Thank you for sharing sacred fellowship with us.*



Welcome to all first-time (and returning) guests to Faith UCC! We would like to get to know you and for you to get to know us. Join us after worship for coffee and conversation.

There is free parking on Sundays at the meters and at the McAlister & Pugh Street parking garages – so, we hope you'll worship with us again next Sunday!

Electronic Giving Options: During the offering time in the service, you may place your offerings on the plates the ushers will bring around. If you prefer to give electronically simply scan the QR code with your smart phone to be directed to our online donation page.



June Special Offering

Strengthen the Church (STC) is a special mission offering to reimagine and build the future of the UCC: to largely support youth ministries and full-time leaders for new churches in parts of the country where the UCC voice has not been heard.

STC funds will also be used to award grants to help congregations communicate the "God is still speaking," message.

Please note "STC" in the memo line of your check or on the giving envelope.

Thank you for your consideration and financial support!



- July 2 Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time No Communion
July 4 Independence Day
July 7 First Friday
July 9 Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Communion Sunday
July 16 Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Get In Touch with Us!

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Church Office Email: faithucc@comcast.net Pastor's Email: revbmyers@yahoo.com
Church Office Hours: 9:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays, & Fridays

Please make an appointment with Rev. Myers if you would like to meet with the pastor. You may call the church office, or his cell at 608-370-9472.

Faith UCC is an open and affirming church, embracing diversity in our congregation and community, and affirming the dignity and worth of every person. We are an inclusive community of faith that celebrates God's presence through worship and the sharing of God's word. We welcome all persons into the full life and ministry of the church, regardless of race, ethnic background, gender identity, sexual orientation, capability, or circumstance of life.

Our Ministry

- Ministers — All the Congregation
Ushers — Cyndi Vincenti
Liturgist — Mary Jane Wild
Acolyte —
Fellowship —
Pastor — Rev. Bret Myers
Trustee —
Children's Message —
Nursery — Jean Cole, Lois Bair

Church Staff

- Custodian — Scott Luzier
Choir Director — Colin Ruffer
Administrative Assistant — Jeff Stormer
Church School Coordinator — Barbara Chellman
Pianist — Colin Ruffer

The liturgies for this morning's worship, along with the Song of Dedication, were written by Rev. Bret S. Myers except where otherwise noted.

Prayers for healing and wholeness:

Linda Merchant, Lisa B. (JoAnn's daughter), Brandon G., Lisa Neidigh, Bunnie Hartswick, Katelynn Wilson, the Family of Jean Dreese, Darlene Ripka, April S., Randy Brown (Aimee's Dad), the Parrish Family, the Piggot family, Robert Zupp (Eileen Pfaff's nephew), the family of Ruth Tressler, the family of Susan Meyer, and Bob Dunham



Altar Flowers Courtesy of C. Meyer



## *Nourishment for the Journey* *“Cruel Ironies, and Life-Giving Water”*

Since chapter 18.1-15 of Genesis, where Abraham showed incredible hospitality for his three guests, and Sarah was promised her own child (Abraham already had Ishmael via Hagar; cf., chap. 16), much has happened in the life of this family. Abraham has argued morally with God at length (Gen. 18.16-33), including 6 different requests, over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah – pleading that if 50, 45, 40, 30, 20, or even 10 righteous persons were found there that the whole cities (filled, we’re told, by unjust, corrupt, and violent people) would be saved from destruction.

Abraham’s extravagant welcome of the three immigrant men is equaled by his adamant advocacy for the people of these two cities by his pleading with God to turn away from God’s wrath towards them. Abraham goes so far as to question God’s character if God were to destroy a place that had any righteous people in it; and presumably the morality of God in killing even the unrighteous as well since they will also be spared according to Abraham’s protests if there exists only a minimum number of just, honest, and peaceful people.

Abraham certainly seems to be an exquisite man of faith and morality to this point (at least in these two instances; though certainly not in some other instances), but things for he and his family (even his extended family!) devolve from this point.

Two of the three men that Abraham had fed, now called angels, visit the house of Lot (Abraham’s nephew) in Sodom (19.1-23). In fantastic hyperbole it is said that “all” the men, young and old, of Sodom came calling on these two men/angels, and Lot tried to protect these two by offering the men of Sodom his own two daughters for satisfying their carnal desires. The two men strike all the Sodomites blind to alleviate the situation, and told Lot and his family to leave the city so it can be destroyed.

Why Lot was spared given his offer of his daughters is a conundrum for the modern mind, yet would have been seen as noble to the ancient, and misogynist, mind. Lot, his wife, and two daughters were the only ones claimed to have been spared the destruction of Sodom – though his wife was turned into a pillar of salt (19.26) for looking back at the city (apparently with either compassion, or longing, which God, as portrayed, found unjustified). Going to the nearby city of Zoar, Lot and his daughters lived in a cave where they had incestuous relations instigated, the text asserts, by the daughters (19.30-36). The children produced from this intrafamilial episode resulted, we’re told, in the origin of the Moabite (from whom Ruth, great grandmother of King David, descended) and Ammonite peoples (19.37-38).

Abraham himself was also moving about, settling in Gerar – also in southern Canaan. Abraham, as he had done previously at least once, claimed to the local king that his wife, who was very beautiful but elderly, was his sister – thus gifting her to the local King for his concubine or wife for fear that he would be killed by the King if they knew she was his wife (20.1-18). What did Sarah think about this justification? Why was she herself willing to comply with it? How did such behavior affect their relationship, and could this be part of the reason she had been barren for so long? It is striking the irony of how those so intensely ethical in some instances could be so unethical in others. Genesis is actually filled with such ironies, story after story. As before in a prior instance, the King learns the truth and decides to spare Abraham and Sarah despite their deceit – incredibly sending them on their way with more than when they arrived.

Their having been liberated from an onerous situation once again, Sarah becomes pregnant – not only with child, but also with vengeance. Though she had been the one to tell Hagar, her Egyptian slave girl (consider the irony here with the fact that the whole people of Israel would become slaves to the Egyptians!), to have relations with her husband and become his wife so that he might have a child (a custom not uncommon in the ancient world) since she herself was barren, she had become resentful of Hagar – and most likely her husband as well. She likely felt shame at Hagar’s conception and of her giving birth to Ishmael. Sarah had intended (Gen. 16.2) to become the mother of Ishmael, since Hagar was her slave, but it must have never materialized that Sarah had genuine love for the boy. She still pined for a son from her own womb. She treated Hagar wretchedly when she conceived, such that Hagar temporarily ran away, until God is said to have enticed her to go back to her oppressor (16.6-9). The poor treatment did not stop, and perhaps Ishmael was also a maleficary while growing up.

14 years passed since the birth of Ishmael when Isaac was born. Sarah was overjoyed (21.6-7). She spoke of her laughter – which could be interpreted both as her bliss in finally having a son and having that shame removed of after being barren for so long, but also as a sense of reestablishing her placement as the first, and therefore most important, wife of Abraham – which she proceeded to demote the ranking of Hagar and Ishmael. Harder times had come for the “son of Hagar the Egyptian” and for the woman Sarah referred to as a “slave woman” (21.10). She called neither one of them by their names, but only by their inferior status.

Whatever insecurity or demure attitude that Sarah may have had while she was childless vanished during the weaning of her son. Once Isaac was weaned, approximately 3 y.o., Sarah saw the 17 y.o. Ishmael with him, “playing” (21.9). The Hebrew term for playing can also mean “mocking” – which would make Sarah’s ensuing rage more understandable, though still vile. Sarah tells Abraham to expel his other wife and his first born son. She cannot bear to think that “the son of this slave woman” will inherit anything from Abraham, and believes that it all should go to her own son Isaac. Ancient custom was that the first born son, Ishmael, would receive a far larger portion of inheritance than any successive son (unfortunately girls had no legal entitlement).

Abraham is said to be greatly distressed by this ultimatum of his first wife; thought apparently more on behalf of his son, Ishmael, than for his wife, Hagar (21.11). Indeed, the word for his type of distress denotes that it was a distress over what he considered to be “evil.” He has silently been appalled, we infer, at Sarah’s treatment of Hagar and Ishmael. He has himself been demure for many years in not standing up for Hagar and Ishmael against her wrath (cf., 16.6). Granted, he is stuck between a rock and a hard place. If he continues to house and care for Hagar and Ishmael, he’ll have the wrath of his first wife. If he casts them out, then he will have the guilt of having abandoned his other wife and child.

One would hope for some divine intervention at this point, something to resolve the dilemma in which people’s spirits change and everyone gets along lovingly and peacefully. But the divine intervention suggested by the writer of this story is that God agrees with Sarah, and tells Abraham to “not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman” (21.12). Wow! God is said to use the very dehumanizing language of not calling them by their own names, and indeed reducing their position within the family from wife and 1<sup>st</sup> born son to categorizations of a lesser humanity. It truly is appalling.

God tells Abraham to do whatever Sarah tells him. While this may trigger a snarky kind of laughter by women who wistfully consider this kind of power over their husbands, or perhaps males

in general, the fact that she is obviously beside herself with a raging vengeance against Hagar and Ishmael reveals no moral forethought by the author in portraying God as going along with whatever Sarah says. God's sudden apathy for the ethics of the situation is abominable. Depicted here, the God we know who has always emphasized good relationships with others, justice, mercy, peace, and compassion flippantly becomes disinterested in the gravity of the depth of relationships that morally bind these people together.

The justification for this is that God "will make a nation of him" – though troubling not because God esteems Ishmael or Hagar themselves, but "because he is your (Abraham's) offspring" (21.13). Does the end justify the means? I can't imagine it doing so. Nothing, by the way, is said of what God will do on behalf of Hagar. Abraham, the very same Abraham who vociferously and repetitively argued that God be just on behalf of horribly unjust people from Sodom and Gomorrah, complacently abides by God's suggestion to take the advice of someone hell bent on vindictiveness. Interestingly, the wrath God displayed towards Sodom and Gomorrah is roughly equivalent to the wrath of Sarah towards Hagar and Ishmael. They are cohorts of fevered rage and violence towards those they believe have acted wrongly – obviously not a very divine trait, and quite the opposite of Jesus' "love even your enemies."

I personally cannot believe that the God I serve, the one of love, compassion, peace, justice, kindness, mercy, patience, and a litany of other virtues, would ever recommend such a thing. And the presence of such scriptures that depict God in this way have led to barbaric acts of violence and cruelty towards others throughout history; continuing still today in bans against Muslims (the spiritual kin of Ishmael no less!), repeal of healthcare for the poor, deporting of fathers, mothers, and children, refugees and immigrants who have lived peacefully in this country, and the abandonment of rights of LGBTQI persons, women, and people of at least 6 nations of Middle Eastern descent – policies that will result in the deaths of people in our time more assuredly than those in this Biblical story. There is no end to justify the means of dehumanization of Hagar and Ishmael; or any person, then or now. There is no way to rectify the disaffirmation of Abraham's emotions of being told to cast out his own wife and child for the satisfaction of Sarah; no more than tearing families apart by ICE raids. And it is unconscionable to take Sarah's side here when she is being so ruthless; just as it is for siding with those whose racism is on full display in creating public policy that violates the humanity of various ethnic groups. This cannot be God speaking, but rather a very human author who has allowed his own cultural biases to infect his conception of God; just as continues to be done by those who claim they are Christian while doing the opposite that Jesus would do.

Apparently, in accordance with Sarah's instruction, Hagar and Ishmael are given a piece of bread and a single skin of water, and are cast out into an arid and barren desert, alone; where anyone in that culture would recognize as a slow, lingering, torturous death sentence. Abraham is by this time a man of great wealth and means. He could have sent hired hands or other slaves to go with them until they reach safety, taking provisions of ample supply for years. He could have given Ishmael the full amount of the inheritance he had coming to him by law as the 1<sup>st</sup> born son. Nothing. He could have stood up to his wife, and even God (as he had done several times before). Nada.

His moral compass had gone awry, and Sarah's had become obliterated. Sarah's laughter, which we have witnessed previously, once as incredulity and once as joy, has now become demonic. She knows this woman and her son will never be able to make it to the next town with so little provisions in crossing a mountainous desert landscape. She will be the only wife, and have her husband's only surviving son. All that he has will be theirs. She won't have to share any of it with the wife she

granted him, or the son that arose. Both of them will be but bad memories for her, but no longer her problem.

It is said that Hagar and Ishmael "departed, and wandered about in the wilderness." The verbs here are the same that will later be used, again ironically, for the people of Israel after being cast out of Egypt by Pharaoh. The irony is not only that the roles are reversed (viz., an Egyptian be a slave of a Hebrew rather than vice versa), but that being cast out actually led to the liberation of both. The Israelites, while predicted to die (by their own opinion) in the wilderness were liberated from their bondage in Egypt. Likewise, Hagar and Ishmael, given even less assurance of survival were ultimately liberated from their bondage to Sarah (and to lesser degree, Abraham).

Many commentators point to this eventual positive outcome and laud God, Abraham, and sometimes even Sarah for their choices. But this is disingenuous in my estimation. People have emotional connections with each other, and moral responsibilities to one another, that are ripped apart in this story. They are minimized, if not totally disregarded. The only real honesty comes with Hagar in the wilderness with her son, whereupon she recognizes their inevitable doom, sets her "child" under a bush and then walks a distance of bowshot from him (enough that she cannot easily hear him), and turns looking away from him so that she will not have to bear seeing him die in the desert with her own eyes. She weeps and prays to God. No answer. Ishmael must have also been weeping, however, and God does "hear" (again, a play on words given that his name is "God hears") him. The text again does not state his name, but only calls him "the boy" (though now at 17 y.o. he is closer to being a young man). In hearing the voice of Ishmael, "the angel of God" (could this be one of the same ones that had visited Abraham and Lot?) speaks to Hagar and gives her assurance that God has "heard the voice of the boy".

Hagar is told to "lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand," (21.18) which is reminiscent of Moses lifting up the snake to perform miracles and his staff to part the waters of the Red Sea. (Likewise, Jesus is lifted up on the cross and held fast to it). It is as if to say that if she goes to the boy and stays with him, that a miracle will be performed for them too. Lift him up and hold him fast might as well be "love him and keep loving him." There is blessing in this, no matter what else may happen.

Regardless of the deserts of life that we may have to endure, the injustices we must overcome, the hatred and vengeance of others that imperils our very lives, and the neglect of those who we thought once loved us, if we will only love one another and hold each other in our hearts and with our arms, we will see things anew and be refreshed in our being. This is essentially what happens. When she gets up, goes over to her son to be with him, her heart no doubt pouring out for him, her eyes were opened and "she saw a well of water."

I love this part of the story! While it does not redeem, for me, all that preceded it, it nevertheless is a hope-filled lesson about life. After having already given up, casting out her dreams for her and her son in facing a circumstance that she trusted could only lead to death, something deep inside Hagar tells her to refuse to give up before death has overtaken them. With what amounts to defiance of fate in the midst of her anguish and misery, she decides that she will be with her son. She'll muster the strength to look upon him and his death rather than remain separated from him for one more moment. With her hope and faith gone, she steadfastly holds on to love – love for her son, and perhaps also for herself. They were both outcast and unloved by Abraham, Sarah, and God, she must have felt, but she will not herself cast her son away from her even if it is to help her to deal with her grief. And in this defiant love for her son, this "slave woman" finds her freedom.

She finds it first in her unremitting love that would rather be united with him in death than separated in dying; and then when that love opens her eyes to her son and her new surroundings, she finds it in a well of water, previously hidden in her despair.

Waters, the parting and closing of them, would later save the Israelites from the Egyptian army. Hagar and Ishmael were parting now with relationships with those they knew as family, having drunk the last drop of the little water they were given when cast out; and they must have received some closure by finding a well which would sustain into the future without having to depend on those who abandoned them. We all need such wells. Here water, the symbol of life and renewal, of purity of spirit and heart, would save Hagar and Ishmael from the barrenness of being owned by others, from the famine of low self-worth, from the aridness of being outcasts, from the desolation of feeling alone in the world. Wonderfully, the God we all know returned to be with them – the God of refugees, the oppressed, the despised, and the rejected; as much if not more so than the God of the secure, the privileged, the esteemed, and the vaunted.

With eyes now wide open, Hagar reveals her love, the life-giving water she gives to her son and to herself, by going to the well, filling up the skin of water, and giving him the first drink. This generosity and self-giving would continue as she would end up finding a wife for him “from the land of Egypt” (i.e., her homeland, and the place where the Abraham & Sarah’s descendants would be enslaved by her descendants). These twists of fate, the story seems to reveal, is what makes up human existence. It is not always easy to understand. Generally good people sometimes do some horrible things, and even God (in some people’s minds, though not my own) seems to support or allow that which is heinous. And yet, yes, despite the tragedy of it all, we are able to see with new eyes and refresh ourselves with the life-giving waters of love – even when hope and faith have temporarily faded.

--- Rev. Bret S. Myers, 6/21-22/2017

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# Announcements and Upcoming Events

**Interested in being a new member of Faith UCC?**



**start here**

As Faith UCC welcomes a new interim pastor, we also welcome new members to join in our community of faith. If you are interested in becoming a member of our family, please let Rev. Myers know of your interest. If you are unsure whether you would like to take this step now or later, Rev. Myers will be glad to speak with you regarding your questions and concerns.

A special **Thank You!** to Colin Ruffer for today!  
Colin, we appreciate your faithfulness!



Colin, we appreciate your faithfulness!  
serving as Pianist again



**Please Note: COFFEE HOUR AT WEBSTERS** – IICC Coffee Hours return on Monday, July 17 & Monday, August 21 – (& move to 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays September – February!)

## Heart & Soul Gatherings:

As the first major necessary step of the interim process, we will be gathering in small groups of 8-10 to get to know each other better “heart and soul.” Each member and attendee of the church is to select a time to sign up for one of these meetings led by Rev. Myers.

This is both an opportunity to get to know each other better, and to recognize the diversity we have within our church as we each tell the story of our own spiritual journey from birth to the present in a confidential group.

This sharing time will help us to identify what is most valuable to us and to others in our spiritual journeys, which will be important to creating a context of self and other-understanding for which we can later address the historical and current successes and challenges within the life of our congregation as a whole.

Please choose to be in a group of persons in which you do NOT know each other well. Therefore, long term friends should not be in the same group. Couples may attend the same group.

You may choose from the following schedule:

Monday, June 26 <sup>th</sup>	1-3:30 p.m. or 6-8:30 p.m.
Tuesday, June 27 <sup>th</sup>	10 a.m.-12:30 p.m. or 5:30-8 p.m.
Wednesday, June 28 <sup>th</sup>	1-3:30 p.m. or 6-8:30 p.m.

If you cannot make any of these times, please contact Rev. Myers to let him know times you would be available. It is important that **EVERY** person in our congregation attend one of these Heart & Soul Gatherings.

Sign up at the round table in the Gathering Space.

## Your Voice in Local Government

**to:** Human Service Agencies  
**from:** Ed LeClear, Planning and Community Development Director  
**subject:** Public Hearing to Obtain the Views of Citizens, Public Agencies and Other Interested Parties on Housing and Community Development Needs and on Development of Proposed Activities.  
**date:** June 20, 2017

Federal regulations require communities that receive entitlement Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) funds from the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development to complete a Consolidated Plan, which is a five-year planning document that identifies a community's overall housing and community development needs and a strategy to meet those needs. State College Borough is in the process of developing its 2018 Consolidated Annual Action Plan which lists the activities to be undertaken with CDBG and HOME funds during that year.

As part of the process, the State College Borough CDBG Citizen's Advisory Committee will hold a public hearing to obtain the views of citizens, public agencies and other interested parties on housing and community development needs, the development of proposed activities, and proposed strategies and actions for affirmatively furthering fair housing. The Committee is interested in accepting comments on the need for affordable housing as well as the need for priority non-housing community development activities such as public improvements, public facilities, public services and economic development. The public hearing will be held at the State College Municipal Bldg., 243 S. Allen St., at Noon on July 6, 2017.

Citizens are encouraged to attend the meeting and comment. In addition, individuals or organizations that are interested in applying for CDBG or HOME funds are urged to contact the Planning Dept. at the telephone numbers listed below.

Persons with a disability who wish to attend the meeting and require an auxiliary aid, service, or other accommodation to participate in the proceedings, are requested to call (814) 234-7109 (voice) or (814) 234-7101 (TTY) at least 48 hours prior to the meeting to discuss your needs. For further information, contact the Planning & Community Dev. Dept. at (814) 234-7109.