

# Sermon Text for November 1, 2015

*By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema*

Philippians 1:18b-26, Genesis 21:8-21

## **“Life’s lessons”**

Last week we had fun hearing God’s laughter and taking part in the laughter that comes in the security of knowing that we are one of God’s children and how we are able to live in confidence and assuredness that God is in control. Today we are going to switch gears a little bit and talk about the lessons that we learn in life. Now I know that you are probably thinking to yourselves, boy, he is talking about me because I have sure learned some hard lessons in my life. Everybody learns in a different way in life. Our experiences are able to teach us volumes about who we are and about our relationship with God. But each of us learn differently from our experiences. But nothing teaches us better and nothing leaves a lasting imprint on our lives like a tragedy or a situation where you have to confront the question of is God good. Today we will see through our life’s experiences and through the experiences of Hagar in the Bible that God is good all the time. We will see that all the time, God is good.

Hagar is able to allow her life’s lessons teach her to draw closer to God instead of giving up and allowing life’s situations tear her down and leave destitute and without hope. As Christians we are hopeful people because we know that God is at work in all circumstances. And we know that wherever God is present, hope is found. Let see how we can learn from life’s lessons.

Some years ago there was an article in Time Magazine entitled “When God Hides His Face”. It is a truly amazing article. For me it is the most accurate portrayal of a healthy Christian approach to God’s presence in our lives while we are in the midst of a storm, while we are completely overwhelmed with everything that is happening around us. I know that some of you have been there. They are those times when you feel kind of numb and things are happening around you and to you and you feel like you have no control and ultimately that nobody has control and you don’t know how to stop it.

The article is about a man and a woman who have a boy and then are pregnant with a little girl. The girl is born but is badly deformed and they find out that it is due to Zellwegger Syndrome. This disease is very rare and it is caused by the fact that both husband and wife are carriers of the disease and that is the only way that it is produced.

After about 200 days the girl dies and the couple realizes that every child from then on that they have will have that disease. So they take steps to not have any future children.

The man goes to his doctor and does what men do so that they will not have children and even with that treatment there is a one in 2,000 chance for a child to be born. In over a year's time they are pregnant again and the child that they will have will die within a few months. Can you imagine the journey of faith and doubt and that this couple is on. They are simple people, they are not celebrities or pillars of the church but rather a Christian couple who have a faith that is one that we ought to pay close attention to. But the key to their experience is that they are able to see this as an opportunity to learn and discern God's presence in all of this, and at times even they admit it is difficult at best to understand. But they are able to learn from this experience and they don't allow it to tear down or destroy their relationship and their experience of who God is in their life.

In the book of Job after the main character is besieged by one calamity after another his friends, and even his wife tells him to curse God and die. Basically they are telling him why don't you just give up and die. With friends and a wife like that who needs enemies? This couple that I have told you about, the Guthries, had some friends who very understandably asked why doesn't God give this second lesson to someone else, they've learned enough already. But the husband responds that this is not a lesson that God patented or made custom fit for them but rather it is a situation with lessons to learn in it. Our lives are filled with situations, experiences with lessons to learn in them. Look at your life in that way.

Our Christian approach to the good and bad that happens in our life needs to be shared by our understanding of who we are in relationship to God in the scheme of life. The husband stated that he thought it was shortsighted to say that God does something in relationship to us. Maybe it has nothing to do with us. Maybe the reason that things take place around us, maybe the event or the experience that we are undergoing at that present time is geared to affect somebody else. Maybe it has nothing to do with us. That is hard for us to imagine and to fathom because we think so egotistically that when a tragedy occurs in our life we try to find the lesson that God has made for us. Maybe God used that experience for somebody else.

But without some basic assumptions like God is good, God is in control, or that all things work out for the good for those who trust in the Lord, without these basic assumptions it can only be bad. There is no redeeming value whatsoever in all of our

experiences. There is nothing we can learn, all it is is God pulling rank like he did with Job stating I created you so you really have no say.

But, thank God, thank God!, we do learn and we don't give up because we know that through our life's lessons we learn.

Hagar's experience looks from the outset like one that we have a hard time relating to. A woman kicked out on the streets who runs out of water and food and is so despondent over the imminent death of her child from starvation and dehydration that she throws him under a plant and walks away so not to hear his cry and see his coming death. Actually it does sound somewhat familiar to some instances that happen in our society. The trouble all started even before Ishmael was born. Sarah and Hagar never got along and this is now the second time that Sarah forces Hagar to flee or to leave the camp, by force.

We see today how after just a few verses Sarah goes changes her personality from one of laughter and celebration to one of hatred and oppression. She sees her child playing with Hagar's child, both of which are Abraham's and it was too much for her. The child of a slave shall share the inheritance with my child. When she tells Abraham this he goes to God and basically says, what should I do? This scene in the Bible reminds of two men who are confronted with a decision of what to do with a cantankerous woman. Twice God speaks in this entire episode. Once here where he states, don't worry, I will take care of them so go ahead and kick them out of the camp. The second time is when after they have left and are both about to die God comes to a weeping, distraught, hopeless Hagar and states don't worry, your boy will live and in fact he will become a great nation.

Hagar had not learned from her previous lesson in the desert when God had delivered her but here was ready to give up hope once again. Scripture states that she closed her eyes and wept. She was not able to see the future but only able to commiserate in the present. She had to go through her process of weeping, she had to go through her time of desperation and hopelessness until God was able to speak to her. Once God speaks to her, her eyes are opened and she is able to see what the lessons that she is able to learn from this experience. Once her eyes are opened she sees the running water in front of her and realizes her deliverance and understands that God will take care of not only her boy but also of her. But it took an event, it took an experience for her to learn that.

Brothers and sisters our time in this fallen world is limited, we either believe or we don't. We either learn that God is by our side and wants us to give our lives over to him and then learn from him, or we don't. Allow your experiences to make you and your family stronger, allow them to build you up and then like Hagar use them so that you can see clearly in the future. If Hagar had given up a whole nation through Ishmael would have perished. She listened to God, opened her eyes, learned from the life that God had presented to her, and didn't give up.

Paul states in Philippians: Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance. Life's lessons oftentimes come as a result of prayer and being able to step back and see God's hand in all that is happening.

Our time together needs to be a time that we learn by coming closer to Christ because we have learned the most crucial of life's lessons: God is good, all the time. Once we are able to learn that lesson, then all other events in life can fall into place.

Amen.