

Raised To Life
⊕⊕ We are Seen ⊕⊕
February 18, 2018
Genesis 16:7-14

Merriam Webster defines tenacious as: ***not easily pulled apart; cohesive; tending to adhere or cling; persistent in adhering to or seeking something valued.*** As I contemplated this week's scripture and what God requires of our faith, I believe tenacious is the perfect adjective. God wants our faith to be persistent. God desires us to be tenacious in our faith. That which is so much more than just persistent, diligent or frequent. Tenacious carries with it a much stronger sense. In the Old Testament there are these two people who I believe can show us what a tenacious faith looks like and what happens when we take matters into our own hands and forget to stay tenacious after the things of God. Because I fully believe God is looking for:

GOD DESIRES TENACIOUS FAITH.

Tenacious = not easily pulled apart; cohesive; tending to adhere or cling; persistent in adhering to or seeking something valued. (Miriam Webster)

A very long time ago God called this guy named Abram. He called and asked Abram if he would be willing to follow Him – no matter what. Abram says yes, and the journey began. Abram and his wife Sarai started out on a trip that God said would have them setting up house in what is known as the Promised Land. Along the way they tenaciously stick to God's direction...for the most part. You see, Abram and Sarai are a lot like us. We like where God wants us to go, we just want to be in charge of the trip planning. Look at what happens.

Hagar is an Egyptian slave to Sarai, Abram's wife. Abram and Sarai left Ur when God commanded them, and God promised them they would live in the Promised Land and that their offspring would be more numerous than the stars in the sky. In Genesis 16, Abram and Sarai have been living in the promised Land for 10 years. So, that part of God's prophecy has been fulfilled. They are living in the land of milk and honey and are at peace. But Sarai is getting nervous. She isn't a spring chicken and her biological clock is ticking and Abram doesn't yet have any children, let alone as many as the stars in the sky. So, Sarai takes things into her own hands. It was the custom in that day that if a woman didn't have children, she would give her servant to her husband to conceive and that child would be the heir. So that's exactly what Sarai did. She followed the human custom of the day and gave Hagar to Abram. Hagar gets pregnant, she begins to flaunt it in Sarai's face and this is where we pick up in the scripture this morning.

READ Genesis 16:7-14

Now we have an interesting conundrum in the story of Abraham and his descendants. God promised that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. And now we've got a pregnant woman who has been cast out and who is an Egyptian, a foreigner. God doesn't forsake Hagar and this passage God gives Hagar and Ishmael their own promise, but it is also clear that God's story has been interrupted. God's plan was for Abram to become Abraham and Sarai to become Sarah and that the two of them would be the parents of many nations. We know that will eventually play out with the birth of Isaac, but we now have another child because Sarai and Abram took things into their own hands. Yes, they followed the customs of the day, but they didn't wait on God's plan. They were struggling. They were aging and getting older. They'd already waited for 10 years and still no child. They wanted it now and so they took matters into their own hands. They didn't wait. They didn't take it to God. They didn't listen. Instead they resorted to their own devices. This morning, this story teaches us that true tenacious faith means waiting on God. That when things get rough, or our path doesn't seem to be going exactly the way we want, or the road gets bumpy ... instead of taking matters into our own hands, firing off an email or Tweet, or setting about another plan or throwing in the towel ... instead we are to wait. If we are going to be people who are seeking after God with tenacity, then we have to learn how to wait a whole lot better than we do right now.

TENACIOUS FAITH WAITS.

Then Sarai treated Hagar so harshly that she finally ran away. (Genesis 16:6 NLT)

Abram and Sarai believed in the promise, they were already residing in the land, they just couldn't wait to see where God was leading them. Instead, they fired up their own ways and went ahead with the what they thought God should have been doing by now. Now I of all people know exactly how hard this waiting thing is to do. You can see how easily Abram and Sarai thought they were doing the right thing with Hagar. It's allowed, it's the custom in the land ...instead of

just sitting in to what God planned. As I was preparing for this sermon, I heard a commentator put it beautifully, "Faith is not easy. It calls for a persistence which is against common sense. It calls for believing in a gift from God which none of the present data can substantiate."

And so, Abram and Sarai don't wait, and we have a pregnant Hagar who is wandering in the wilderness attempting to return to her native Egypt because she's feeling abandoned. And she comes upon a spring in the wilderness near Shur. Now I have been in the wilderness between modern day Israel and Egypt. It is literally a wilderness of rock and sand. Now imagine Hagar wandering in this wilderness on foot, pregnant and she comes upon a spring. This is a miracle because this spring meant lifesaving water. And now the Hebrew word that is used for spring here translates as "eye." It is an eye of water gushing from the earth's core. In the middle of her pain and wandering, when she probably wanted to forsake God, Hagar receives a miracle to keep her going. She finds a spring, it points her back to God. These were tangible gifts to Hagar in the middle of her suffering. You see, to Hagar, these miracles are God "seeing" her. God has provided for her even when she is in her condition. I mean a spring in the desert?! Now how many times have we gone about our day oblivious to or blind to the miracles present in our lives? How many times have we taken for granted the many blessings that God has provided us with? What would happen if we began to tenaciously take notice of those things? You see that is what tenacious faith does. It sees where God is working. It sees the miracles. It never gives in or gives up knowing that God is still watching, God still sees what's going on and God is still at work.

GOD TENACIOUSLY WATCHES OVER US: GOD CALLS US TO BE TENACIOUS TOO.

The angel of the LORD found Hagar beside a spring of water in the wilderness, along the road to Shur. (Genesis 16:7 NLT)

In the middle of our suffering, it is so easy to simply give up on God. To allow our anger at God to overwhelm us and cloud out everything else. To walk away from faith, to stop going to church or our small group. To forget why we believe in the first place. Hagar wasn't a saint, she was a normal woman wandering in the wilderness very pregnant. I bet she was angry, I'm pretty sure she was sick and tired. And yet, she saw the spring - she grasped the miracle right in front of her. God is ever present in our lives. And there are miracles each day ... it is for us to see where God is present and showing up. Those miracles for us may simply be a hug from a friend who drops in unexpectedly, a few small things to give thanks for. An email from someone out of the blue to offer encouragement. A rainbow in the sky or the sun peeking through the clouds. There are indeed miracles happening and tenacious faith helps us see them.

Hagar finds herself standing before an angel of the Lord. While Ishmael may not have fully been part of God's original plan, God doesn't forget Ishmael and he too receives a blessing. And the angel instructs Hagar to return to Abram and Sarai. Now this is very interesting. Life will not be all easy now that Ishmael has a blessing. Hagar will still have to face life as a slave. She will still face harsh treatment from Sarai. And she will watch as Isaac is favored over her own son. Life will continue to be difficult. But Hagar goes back, knowing that she isn't alone. She has seen God. The scripture says, ***She said, "You are the God who sees me." She also said, "Have I truly seen the One who sees me?"¹⁴ So that well was named Beer-lahai-roi (which means "well of the Living One who sees me").***

GOD SEES YOU.

She said, "You are the God who sees me." (Genesis 16:13 NLT)

God sees you. God sees everything. The Lord is in the deep, down, and dirty. The Creator knew what you what you would be going through. He knew where you would be when you got lost, when you walked away, and when you were ready to give up. Ahead of time, He sent provisions for you. A kind word. A place to stay. A job posting. A referral to a better doctor. In the voice of another, if you listen, you can hear God speaking. "I hear you. I see you. I'm with you. I have a plan. Trust me."

This is the God in our lives each and every day. God sees us right where we are. God knows when we are wandering in the wilderness. God knows when we feel like we can't go on. God sees us struggling and never ever leaves us alone. It is for us to have a tenacious faith just like Hagar, to go back to our lives and continue to follow each day. Whatever lies in our path and follow.