



## EMMANUEL CHURCH – MORNING WORSHIP 7<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2020



Make some space at home to read and pray through the following, if possible, on the morning of Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> June.  
If you are able, watch this small service via the Emmanuel Church website: [www.emmanuel-eastbourne.org.uk](http://www.emmanuel-eastbourne.org.uk)

**Gathering Words:** ‘Praise the Lord! O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures for ever. Who can utter the mighty doings of the Lord, or declare all his praise? Happy are those who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times.’ (Psalm 106:1-3)

**Prayer:** Way beyond all journeying, truth behind all mystery, life within all living: **WE PRAISE YOU.**



Salve for every soreness, mender of every brokenness, midwife of a better future:  
**WE PRAISE YOU.**

Ground of all being, judge of the nations, conscience of the universe. **WE PRAISE YOU.**  
Maker, Redeemer, confessor, companion, befriender, inspirer, God beyond all names.  
**WE PRAISE YOU. AMEN.**

**Reading:** Genesis 16: 1-6 ‘Hagar Flees for her Life’ (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; <sup>2</sup> so she said to Abram, “The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her.” Abram agreed to what Sarai said. <sup>3</sup> So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. <sup>4</sup> He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. <sup>5</sup> Then Sarai said to Abram, “You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me.” <sup>6</sup> “Your slave is in your hands,” Abram said. “Do with her whatever you think best.” Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.

**Address (1):** ‘Who Matters to God?’

**Reading:** Genesis 21: 14-21 ‘Hagar and Ishmael’ (NIV)

<sup>14</sup> Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the Desert of Beersheba. <sup>15</sup> When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. <sup>16</sup> Then she went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought, “I cannot watch the boy die.” And as she sat there, she began to sob. <sup>17</sup> God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. <sup>18</sup> Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation.” <sup>19</sup> Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. <sup>20</sup> God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer. <sup>21</sup> While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt.

**Address (2):** ‘Who Matters to Us?’

**Prayers for Our World, Ourselves, and The Lord’s Prayer:** *Can be offered here aloud or in silence.*

**Blessing:** ‘Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. And let all the people say, ‘Amen.’ Praise the Lord!’ And may God’s blessing rest lightly upon us and all the world. Amen. (Psalm 106:47-48)

## Address (1): 'Who Matters to God?'

The death of George Floyd on the 25<sup>th</sup> May has been deeply disturbing. To see a black, unarmed, handcuffed man face-down on the floor while a white, armed, uniformed man kneels on his neck is a tragic image. It's not just a restraint we're witnessing, but his killing. The court proceedings against the police officers concerned will now take their own course, but to my mind, every feeling of outrage that is felt is a legitimate expression simply of our basic humanity that lies within. It's outrage partly because of the circumstances of this case, and partly, of course, because this is simply one example among so many – not just in the United States and in every country that is honest enough to acknowledge the evils of racism which pervade.



So what's that got to do with Abram and Sarai and Hagar? This story has come to mind this week, I think, because it also speaks of great injustice. Hagar is a woman, a slave, a foreigner – living in an ancient society where she had no rights, no power, no say in what happened to her body, her life or her future. Hagar is forced to be the mother of Abram's child...and not only that, but then is 'mistreated'. Hagar has only one option open to her – she flees. By doing so, she liberates herself from the oppressive situation she finds herself in. It's her only way out.

Interestingly, after Hagar flees, God hears her, and promises that blessings will come to her and her family in time. Hagar is a slave, outcast, is being treated less than a human being...but to God she is precious and valued and her life is worth something – is worth everything to God. The phrase 'Black Lives Matter' is ringing out at the moment – and we would do well to remember that time and time again in the Bible God is to be found particularly on the side of those who are weak, grieving, vulnerable, or abused. Those making absurd claims today about the killing of George Floyd, or those who seek to silence voices of justice, greatly dishonour themselves, and they greatly dishonour God whose desires peace and fairness for all.

If you're wondering what happens to Hagar next, let's find out. A few chapters later in Genesis, we find Hagar having returned back home, but she and Sarah are not getting on and this time Hagar doesn't flee, she's kicked out altogether. (*Read Genesis 21:14-21 overleaf*)

## Address (2): 'Who Matters to Us?'

So, Hagar and her child are sent off into the desert with barely anything, and when the water has run out, death is at hand. But God has not forgotten them: the name Ishmael means 'God has heard' – and God hears him and his mother. The son of an African slave, literally cast out from their home, is *still* to be the Father of many nations. I love the way at the end of this passage Hagar chooses an Egyptian wife for her son... in those days only the male head of the household could normally do such a thing! God, it seems, not only hears their cries, but responds with presence, responds with promise, and gives hope and great strength to Hagar.

The challenge for you and I in these days is to see hatred, injustice, oppression for what it is: a denial of the love, peace, and justice of God. Sometimes – for example with the killing of George Floyd – it's straightforward to see. Sometimes oppression and discrimination can be subtle and embedded in society and in our structures, in our institutions, in the church. Hagar and her family mattered to God. George Floyd and his family must matter to us. Everyone who suffers increased chance of arrest, homelessness, abuse, rape, poverty, domination, or death because of their ethnicity or nationality must matter to us. Let God's justice and peace come to all, and may we play our part in the living lives fit for the Kingdom of God. Amen.