

## Daily Devotions with the Dean

By [The Very Rev. Dr. Reggie Kidd](#)

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I must have been four or five years old. I don't remember what had transpired between my parents and me. What I do recall is sitting outside on the street curb in front of my house, with my arms around our pet dog "Tuffy," and crying over and over again, "Tuffy, you are the only one who understands. You are the only one who cares."

"And God heard the voice of the boy...." — Genesis 21:17. I don't imagine that a single one of us makes it through childhood without feeling something of what Ishmael felt. We've been left alone to cry hopelessly into the void. It doesn't matter if we grew up with parents who did their best to love us, or with "caregivers" who treated us like worthless discards. We all, I imagine, know what it is to cry alone into the void.

The thing is, there is no void. God's got a bottle for every one of those tears: "You have noted my lamentation; put my tears into your bottle; are they not recorded in your book?" (Psalm 56:8). It must be a big bottle, for sure. A bottle the size of the world. But he hears. He does. And while we may think of God keeping a book on our offenses, the Bible says he's keeping a book on our griefs.

Despite the inattention of some of his servants (like Abraham and Sarah in today's text), God gives ears to other servants to hear the crying. I give thanks for my friends whom God has called to make their homes into refuges of foster care and adoption. I give thanks for friends whom he has called to minister, through organizations like International Justice Ministry, to those who have been trafficked. And I give thanks for friends whom he has called to create bridges of understanding between the spiritual children of Isaac and Ishmael, those who work to find principled common ground between Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

In the Bible's way of thinking, as ignoble as Sarah's motives are, she is correct to believe that God plans to redeem the world through Isaac's line, not Ishmael's (Muslim accounts, of course, differ). It was an ill-conceived plan that led to Ishmael's conception, and it guaranteed tension between what Paul called "the children of the flesh" versus "the children of promise" (Galatians 4:28–29). Nevertheless, what is remarkable about Ishmael's story is that God does not

regard Ishmael as the discard that his father and legal mother do. Others had cast him aside, but God does not.

Hebrews. As the writer to the Hebrews recounts the heroes of the faith, he characterizes them as having one characteristic: living their days as “strangers and foreigners on the earth,” while constantly seeking “a better country, that is, a heavenly one” (Hebrews 11:12,16). There is a stubborn trust that no matter how incomprehensible the circumstance or instruction, there’s always a redemptive end: Abraham intuits that Isaac’s end must be resurrection. Joseph understands Israel’s sojourn in Egypt is prelude to their exodus.

The challenge for us is to respect the fact that on any given day we see only partially what the point of that day is. Loving a difficult child, doing seemingly meaningless work for a less than appreciative boss — we just don’t have the cosmic perspective to see how our faithful obedience is being woven into a rich tapestry of redemption. But “by faith,” we know somehow it is. May that be enough for this day’s journey!

John. At the heart of it all is “faith” that a mere carpenter’s son (“Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?”) did in fact “come down from heaven,” that he is in truth “living bread,” and that “Whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” Crazy! Really, certifiably crazy ... or crazy true!

Be blessed this day,

Reggie Kidd+

\* Because Abraham is eighty-six when Ishmael is born and one hundred when Isaac is born, Ishmael is in his teens when he and his mother are sent away (compare Genesis 16:16 with 21:5).

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