

Ps 86:1-10; Gen 21:8-21; Ro 6:1-11; Mt 10:24-39
God Hears and God Acts – 06-25-17

A young man named Isaac Lewis was driving fast late at night in his pickup – without a seatbelt. He didn't quite make a sharp curve in the highway, jumped the curb into the median, tried to correct, overcorrected and rolled the vehicle several times. He was thrown from the wreck onto the pavement. His skull, cheekbone and eye socket were shattered on the right side. He had steering column damage to his lower body – bladder and lower bowel. His spine was damaged from the neck to just below the shoulder blades. He was taken to the nearest medical center – in Lubbock TX. That was March 27th of this year. My colleague, Danny, put out a prayer call to the whole UM area – plus to any and all anywhere who would pray for Isaac's healing. After multiple surgeries and reconstructions, Isaac is in rehab and is working to regain the brain function he lost due to traumatic brain injury – and the mobility impaired by his spinal injury. His body was broken, but his spirit and soul have been renewed by visits, messages and gifts from his

school mates, family, friends – and his pastor and his church.

In the body of Christ – we don't do anything in isolation. We are joined together in this covenant. We share worship, prayer, mission, ministry – we share our joys and sorrows. And, when we come to Jesus as people who believe in Him and follow Him – we act on our promise. We ask to be baptized. In the water of Holy Baptism we die to sin. We act out the death of Jesus – when we go under the water. We act out Jesus' resurrection when we rise out of the water. From then on, we live to God. It is the outward sign of the inward grace God gives.

Some ask me, "Is my covenant with Jesus good if I haven't been baptized? My answer is YES! If a person hears the Good News, repents and receives Jesus as Lord of her/his life – then tragically dies later that day, (s)he is gathered into the throng of the redeemed around the throne of God. On a sunny Sunday morning, when you and I have plans to do something fun just as soon as we get out of here, we might forget. But in the night watches and prayer vigils in the ICU, that promise of Jesus' mighty work on

the cross is everything as you and I stare into the face of death.

Most preachers, would rather baptize you immediately. We like to have your public witness confirmed by the church – the body of Christ. But when you surrender your life to God, God hears and God acts to free you and me for joyful obedience. Isaac's very life is witness of God hearing and God acting. He received a miracle.

The story of Hagar begins as a tragedy. She feels like a pawn in the hands of her mistress. Sarah, unable to have children, gave Hagar to her husband so she could bear a son. But once Hagar was pregnant, her barren mistress, Sarah, could not stand Hagar's superior attitude. When the boy was born, the rift between the women became awkward and painful. Abraham loved her son, Ishmael. At last, by a miracle of God, Sarah became pregnant and had a son of her own: Isaac (an earlier Isaac). When Abraham threw a big barbecue in honor of Isaac's weaning, Sarah thought she heard Ishmael laugh at Isaac. By then, Ishmael was about thirteen. That was the last straw. She banished the maid Hagar and

her son. Abraham was distressed, but the Lord did not stop Sarah's harsh action. God promised Abraham that his firstborn, Ishmael, would also become a great nation. And God's original promise that Abraham would be the father of a people as vast as the stars of the heavens, and the sands of the seashore would come to pass just as God had said through Isaac. Double blessing – even in family strife.

This story shines with the glorious character of our God, though Abraham must let Ishmael go. We see that the sovereign will of the Creator cannot be thwarted, diverted or even slowed down by human mistakes – our distrust – or our weak faith. The plan God has for God's people and for all of creation is not always clear to you and me. When we see some of what happens in our world, we ask, "Where is God's goodness in all this?" God says to us, as He said to Abraham, "Wait on Me. Watch for what I am doing." And the great corollary to that truth is, "Pray! Pray for all you are worth. Pray at all times. Watch and pray. And so enter into what God is doing."

In our Gospel passage for today Jesus reflects upon what it really means to belong to Him – to be His disciple. Jesus speaks to the disciples as He sends them out to share what they have learned from Him. He is also warning His disciples of the shocking resistance and even hatred they will encounter. He Himself has come up against the Pharisees and teachers of the law in the church. He knows it is a life or death thing.

First, Jesus explains how much God loves His followers – they are precious – God knows the number of hairs on their heads, He cares for them and watches over them. Jesus does not gloss over the cruelty and violence they (and we) encounter in the world. It was here in Jesus' time – it is still here. He is not trying to break up families when He speaks of all the strife caused by following Him. Let's turn to the Scripture Jesus is quoting back in the Prophet Micah. Not so far back as Abraham (1900 BC), Micah preached in the late 700s and maybe the early 600s BC. Politics were no more inspiring back then than they are now. Micah prophesied against corrupt officials and rulers. He counted the court prophets among them. These are the

ones who said what the kings required them to say. Micah had broken with them, and was preaching in the countryside, not the city (Jerusalem).

Micah is prophesying the coming exile – and further into the future, the coming of Messiah (Jesus Christ). Jesus quotes Micah from 6:5-6 about the enemy being very close. Betrayal of those who are faithful to the God of Israel – who love and serve the Lord and keep His moral standards – is everywhere. He preaches that true hope lies beyond the current chaos, war and exile. Listen:

“But as for me, I will watch expectantly for the Lord;

I will wait for the God of my salvation.

My God will hear me.

Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy.

Though I fall I will rise;

Though I dwell in darkness, the Lord is a light for me.” (Micah 7:7-8)

Jesus does not promise an easy road. No guarantee against conflict and trouble. God hears your prayers. God is already acting to bring about His kingdom. Amen.