

Ishmael Afraid
D'var Torah for Rosh Hashanah Morning 5776
September 14, 2015

As we have done in years past, here at Temple Shalom and in almost all Reform synagogues, we are about to read, on this morning of Rosh Hashanah, *Akedat Yitzchak*, the story of the Binding of Isaac, Genesis 22. There are some years when I have mentioned, mostly in passing, that this is actually the traditional reading for the Second Day of Rosh Hashanah, that it came into Reform practice for the first day mostly from a time when many Reform congregations only observed one day and, even in moving back to holding services for the Second Day, as our synagogue and many others have done, we have kept this reading in place for the occasion when the greater number of congregants are in attendance.

But now, for the first time in a Reform *machzor*, at least as far as I am aware, the traditional reading for the First Day, makes an appearance. There, right after the blue-tinged commentaries on pages 236 and 237, we find, before us, Genesis 21.

I can't help but feel it is fitting, somehow, this year. While we are not reading it together, this is a story that hits home, hard, this year. For this is the story of families fleeing and torn apart, of Abraham, urged by Sarah, kicking out his mistress and first-born son, Hagar and Ishmael. And this year, in every headline we read, in every indelible image, this year we know, Ishmael is indeed a refugee.

My friends, I make a passing mention in my sermon later this morning, to families leaving their homes. And I hope to speak much more about this topic on Yom Kippur – I am not certain yet, that we can have pieces in place for such a discussion, and it will, if it happens, dislodge something else I had been planning on speaking about. But this morning, as we hear Marty Shargel chant Genesis 22, in his beautiful voice... as we struggle with the familiar story, look back, if you can, at what precedes it, and think, now, about both chapters. For the chapters have a great deal in common: they tell a tale of unwanted journeys, and unexpected survival, of family strife, and of salvation coming at the last second, from an unearthly source. As the commentary refers to, there is an external mechanism, "a well in the wilderness, a ram in the thicket." What will be the source of salvation, for those who need it now? Genesis 21 begins on page 238, and the chapter we will read, Genesis 22, begins on page 240.