Narrator: Today we listen for God's word through a woman whose story is often left in the margins.
Her name is Hagar.
She is not the chosen matriarch, not the hero of the promise, not the one whose name fills our hymns.
She is the servant woman, the foreigner, the one used and then cast away.

And yet, she becomes the first person in all of Scripture to name God.
She calls God El Roi "the God who sees me."

So today we'll listen for God through her eyes, through her pain, through her courage, through her wilderness.

This is Hagar's story. This is the Word of the Lord through the voice of the unseen.

Hagar: They never asked me.
Not once.

Not when they brought me from Egypt,
not when they took me into Abram's tent,
not when they decided my body would become their answer to prayer.

No one asked.

They called it faith.
They called it obedience.
They called it covenant.
But to me … it felt like being used.

I was a servant.
A slave.
A foreign woman in a house that wasn't mine.
My name meant *stranger*.
And that's how they treated me.

I fetched water. I baked their bread.
And then they took from me what was mine alone to give.
They called it duty.
I called it violation.

(Look out toward congregation.)
Sarai gave me to Abram as if I were nothing.
And Abram – God's great man of faith –
said nothing.

Silence … can cut deeper than any blade.

I became pregnant.
And for a moment, I thought maybe things would change.
Maybe carrying his child would mean I was seen.

But envy is a cruel master.
Sarai's eyes turned hard.
Her words, sharper than stones.
And Abram said only, *"She's your servant; do with her what you will."*

So she did.
And I –
I ran.

I ran because I couldn't breathe.
Because her words burned.
Because I could not survive one more day of being unseen.

The sand scorched my feet.
The sun tore at my skin.
And when I could run no more,
I collapsed beside a spring in the desert.

There, I thought I would die.
But then –
a voice.

A voice that said ... *my name*.

"Hagar."

No one had said my name like that in years.
"Hagar, servant of Sarai – where have you come from, and where are you going?"

I wanted to say,
"I'm running from cruelty to nowhere."

But the voice was not like any I'd known.
Not command.
Not threat.
Not pity.

It was ... knowing.

And that voice said,
"Go back.
Not because they are right,
but because I will make of you a great nation."

A *great nation?*
For me?
For a woman no one wanted?

And there, beside the spring, I named God.
I said, *"You are El Roi – the God who sees me."*

Because in a world that saw only my function,
God saw *my face*.
In a world that used my body,
God cared for *my soul*.
In a world that left me nameless,
God spoke *my name*.

Years passed.
My son was born – *Ishmael,* "God hears."
For a time, there was laughter in our tent.
But then Sarah – she bore her own child.
And laughter turned to tension again.

One day she said,
"Cast out this slave woman and her son."

And Abraham … he rose early the next morning.
He gave me a loaf of bread,
a skin of water,
and he sent me away.

That's all.
After years of service,
after bearing his child … just a loaf and a skin.

So I ran again.
But this time, not from cruelty –
from despair.

The sun burned.
The boy weakened.
The water ran out.

And when I could not bear to watch him die,
I laid him beneath a bush
and turned my face away.

"I cannot watch the child of my body die."

And I wept.

Then … a voice again.

“Hagar, what troubles you?
Do not be afraid.
God has heard the boy’s cry.
Lift him up.
Take him by the hand.
I will make of him a great nation.”

And suddenly –
a well!
Right there.
Water where there had been only dust.
Life where there had been death.

And I knew … this is the same God.
The God who saw me before
now hears my son.

I, Hagar, know something Abraham and Sarah never learned:
God’s promise cannot be contained by privilege.
God’s mercy overflows boundaries.
God’s love includes the ones the world casts away.

You who are listening –
do you know what it is to be unseen?

To labor without acknowledgment?
To serve without thanks?
To cry out and be met with silence?

Then hear me: God sees.

When you are used and discarded – God sees.
When your name is forgotten – God sees.
When your tears fall in the wilderness – God hears.
When your hope runs dry – God provides.

El Roi – the God who sees.
Ishmael – the God who hears.
Between those two names is my story … and maybe yours.

I am Hagar.
Once invisible.
Once used.
Once discarded.

But now –
I am seen.
I am heard.
I am loved.

And I will not be silent.

The God who saw me
sees still.
The God who heard me
still listens.
The God who provided water in my wilderness
is still making wells for those who thirst.

El Roi.
The God who sees me.
The God who sees *you*.

Narrator: Hagar's story invites us to ask:
Who have we failed to see?
Who have we used for our comfort, our convenience, our success?
And where might we, too, need to run into the wilderness
so that God can meet us again – stripped of our power,
ready to hear the truth of someone else's pain?

Hagar reminds us that God's vision is wider than our hierarchies.
God's compassion spills over the boundaries we draw.
Before there was Israel, before the covenant was sealed,
God's promise of life and future reached out to a *foreign woman* and her *child*.

God's seeing love is not reserved for the chosen few.
It is radical. Boundless. Tender.
It finds the broken and lifts them up.

Maybe that's what it means when the Psalmist says,
"Where can I flee from your presence?"
Even in the wilderness,
even by a dying spring,
even in exile – God is there.

And perhaps, church, that's our calling too –
to be the eyes of El Roi in this world.
To see those who are unseen.
To hear the cries others ignore.
To provide water – hope – life –
in places where despair has taken root.