From Gilead

This week I intend to preach on Genesis 21:14-21, which is the story of Hagar and Ishmael. If these were ordinary times—if I were twenty years younger—I’d be making an orderly passage through the Gospels and the Epistles before I turned to Genesis again. That was my custom, and I have always felt it was effective as teaching, which is really what all this is about. Now, though, I talk about whatever is on my mind—Hagar ad Ishmael at the moment.

The story of Hagar and Ishmael came to mind while I was praying this morning, and I found a great assurance in it. The story says that it is not only the father of a child who cares for its life, who protects its mother, and it says that even if the mother can’t find a way to provide for it, or herself, provision will be made. At that level it is a story full of comfort. That is how life goes—we send our children into the wilderness. Some of them on the day they are born, it seems, for all the help we can give them. Some of them seem to be a kind of wilderness unto themselves. But there must be angels there, too, and springs of water. Even that wilderness, the very habitation of jackals, is the Lord’s. I need to bear this in mind.

Young Boughton came by to see if you felt like a game of catch. You did. He was sunburned from working in the garden. It gave him a healthy, honest look. He’s teaching you to throw overhand. He said he couldn’t stay for supper. You were disappointed, as I believe your mother was also.

The moon looks wonderful in this warm evening light, just as a candle flame looks beautiful in the light of morning. Light within light. It seems like a metaphor for the human soul, the singular light within the great general light of existence. Or it seems like poetry within language. Perhaps wisdom within experience. Or marriage within friendship and love. I’ll try to remember to use this. I believe I see a place for it in my thoughts on Hagar and Ishmael. Their time in the wilderness seems like a specific moment of divine Providence within the whole providential regime of Creation.