

No, You Laughed

Genesis 18:1-15

St. Marks UMC, Charleston, WV 2d Sunday after Pentecost (June 18) 2017

¹ And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks^[a] of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. ² He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth ³ and said, “O Lord,^[b] if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, ⁵ while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.” So they said, “Do as you have said.” ⁶ And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, “Quick! Three seahs^[c] of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes.” ⁷ And Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it quickly. ⁸ Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them. And he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

⁹ They said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” And he said, “She is in the tent.” ¹⁰ The LORD said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. ¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?” ¹³ The LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ ¹⁴ Is anything too hard^[d] for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.” ¹⁵ But Sarah denied it,^[e] saying, “I did not laugh,” for she was afraid. He said, “No, but you did laugh.”

We first learn in the Bible of Abram and Sarai (later named Abraham and Sarah) in their journey as Super Heroes of the Faith at the ages of 75 (him) and 65 (her.)

Now, we certainly cannot apply the stereotypes that some would make of the aged, to them, for we are told that Sarai was so beautiful that they both agreed to pretend that she was Abram’s sister – not his wife – so

that the Pharaoh of Egypt (12:12-20), and later King Abimelech (20:1-11), would not kill Abram in order to have her as their wife. However, as this charade got lived out, and Pharaoh took her as his wife, when she actually was betrothed to Abram, a lot of plagues came upon Pharaoh.¹

In today's passage from the story of these two early Super Heroes of the faith – when we have (as Jennifer preached about last Sunday) the first appearance of the Holy Trinity in the Bible – we hear of Abram and Sarai offering hospitality, and the announcement was made of the son Isaac to be born to Abraham and Sarah. They would be the ages of 100 and 90 when this birth would occur. (21:1-7)

And so, as today's scripture lesson tells us: Sarah laughed. There are several reasons why people laugh. Sometimes, we laugh when we hear a good joke.

- **But, sometimes, we laugh when we are nervous or afraid.**

If my wife were told she were going to have a baby at the age of 90, I'm guessing it would be more out of fear than because "that's a good joke."

I remember the first surgery I had, 42 years after my tonsils were removed. At age 44, I was nervous to be "going under" for the first time. I was on the "runway" waiting for my turn, when I saw a nurse. My "jitters humor" caused me to tell this nurse, "Nurse, nurse, I just saw my doctor come in and he looks drunk as a skunk." It wasn't until she got up closer that my myopic eyes saw that this was actually my doctor's nurse. She said, "I'll make

¹ Actually, in Genesis 20:12 Abram admits that Sarai really is his half-sister.

sure I tell him you saw him so drunk.” She didn’t smile, which I think was her little joke on me.

- **Sometimes we laugh, when we think we’ve “got somebody.”**

Later in our faith history (**Exodus 14**) we are told how the escaping Israelites were caught between the devil and the deep blue sea – or actually between the army of Pharaoh and the Red Sea. The people of Israel cried out to Moses, “Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?”

Pharaoh’s army laughed at the hard place in which they had put the escaping slaves. They would “get them” now. And then God parted the Red Sea; the Israelites followed to their escape; the Egyptian army followed and God closed the Red Sea upon them. Their laughter came to an abrupt end,

- **Sometimes people laugh AT other people.**

The powerful religious leaders of first century Palestine had a problem with this upstart prophet from Galilee, called Jesus. So they conspired to have him betrayed and executed by the Roman authorities. As he hung on their cross of execution, we are told:

⁴¹ So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, ⁴² “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. ⁴³ He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” (Matthew 27:41-43)

Yes, they thought they had finally cured their problem ... until Easter morning. Then their laughing stopped!

I also remember another pastor who laughed at me on just about this same day in June of 2003. He laughed at me for taking an appointment as what he called a “dead end church that only fights amongst themselves and has no future.”

This appointment has grown in ministry and is one of the most coveted appointments in our conference, and his appointment ... well, let me just put it this way: he’s not laughing now.

Sometimes, folks laugh at others when they think they have missed the boat, when, in fact, the one laughed at is the one who has it right!

A poem posted on Facebook from VBS:

“Blessed are the poor in Spirit,
Jesus said, “For theirs
Is the kingdom of heaven.”

Each beatitude we read out:
Blessing “this,” for “that.”
The lesson to learn was HOPE.

Then teacher asked each one of them,
“Use paper, crayon
And write out your favorite.”

One little boy misunderstood:
He blessed the homeless,
For they shall be giv’n a home

Homeless is not one of the eight!

What was he thinking?
He only heard the word HOPE.

There are lots of reasons that people laugh. In my study of laughing, one thing I have found: there are **people who laugh out of fear or who laugh at the plight of others** are usually **people whose God is not big enough**.

In **Genesis 21:6**, we are told that AFTER Sarah had her baby at age 90, she acknowledged, “**God has made laughter FOR me; everyone who hears will laugh WITH me.**”

She moved from the **nervous twitter of one whose god was too small** to the **REJOICING LAUGHTER of a GOD WHO IS VERY BIG**.

People who know a **BIG GOD** have had experiences when they can join with the words of the Psalmist:

**Weeping may tarry for the night,
but joy comes with the morning. (Ps. 30:5b)**

So how can we move from the small god who engenders nervous and fearful twitters, to the rejoicing belly laugh of someone who rests in a

God SO BIG?

We 21st century Americans are addicted to finding answers, to solving problems, to not accepting the mystery of the unknown.

It is only when we submit to the mystery of the unknown, and allow God to be God ... [**repeat this: It is only when we submit to the mystery**

of the unknown, and allow God to be God] ...that we can discover this

God SO BIG

Weeping may tarry for the night,
but joy comes with the morning. (Ps. 30:5b)

- We want answers.
- We want to solve problems.
- We DON'T want to wait upon the Lord
- BUT – thank God -- we don't always get what we want.

How do *you* laugh?

How big is *your* God?

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

AMEN.