

Born of an Old Age
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Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7

¹The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. ²He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. ³He said, 'My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. ⁴Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. ⁵Let me bring a little 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.' ⁶And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, 'Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.' ⁷Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. ⁸Then 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.

⁹They said to him, 'Where is your wife Sarah?' And he said, 'There, in the tent.' ¹⁰Then one said, 'I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.' And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. ¹¹Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. ¹²So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?' ¹³The Lord said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh, and say, "Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?"' ¹⁴Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.' ¹⁵But Sarah denied, saying, 'I did not laugh'; for she was afraid. He said, 'Oh yes, you did laugh.'

¹The Lord dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised. ²Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. ³Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. ⁴And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. ⁵Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ⁶Now Sarah said, 'God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.' ⁷And she said, 'Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.'

"Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?" The text says that Sarah laughed at God's pronouncement that she would bear a child well past menopause but, in my head, I hear her reply almost as a scoff, as if accompanied by a "oh, please," or maybe the disbelief of a "yeah, right." Maybe you remember learning that the name Isaac comes from the word "to

laugh.” I think when God calls you out on laughing and says “Oh yes, you did laugh,” there’s no point pretending you didn’t anymore so why not name the child foretold after that very laughter!

Because it might seem like an “if this, then that” kind of story we heard, I want to make clear that God’s care for us is not conditional; our story today simply emphasizes a very specific response from God to the hospitality of Abraham. Abraham, as they say, entertains angels unaware¹ and God responds by making a promise of joy to Abraham and Sarah. The lesson to be learned is not “do for God and God will do for you” but “Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?” We, here, are, as a church, certainly of an old age - I’d say one hundred and seventy is getting up there in years. That age, however, does not mean our fruitful years are in the past; we know that new things can be born of an old age, now don’t we?

I don’t know what the new things will be and, the truth is, I think that is in part why God is pulling me down a different path, to clear the way for the someone who does have a sense of what new things are coming **and** how to walk with you into them. As pastors, my colleagues and I are very aware that we are all interims, no matter what our title might say or for how long our limited years are numbered. Heck, even Jesus didn’t stay forever with the first church! For the church to live and find new life, God continues to call people to her, which must also, at times, include calling people away.

This may be a time of concern but it just as rightly can be a time of exhilaration. As we stroll along, day-by-day, God’s acting upon the church might not feel so obvious. Today, though, we cannot miss that God is doing something here! The waters are troubled! And the hymn we’ve sung before invites us to wade in the water because God is troubling it. Do you remember the story of the man by the pool from the gospel of John?

“Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids - blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, ‘Do you want to be made well?’ The sick man answered him, ‘Sir, I

¹ Hebrews 13:2.

have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.”²

The understanding was that God was doing powerful things when the water was stirred up.

Now I said that God’s care is not conditional and I stand by that. Note, though what Abraham and Sarah choose to do to be hospitable to God. “Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, ‘Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.’ Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. 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.” Abraham and Sarah used their finest flour without worrying how it was being put to use. Abraham had a calf prepared - do you know how many more years of milk they could have gotten from that calf had it grown into adulthood? But the meat is most tender with a calf and he chose to sacrifice their long-term well-being for the sake of welcome. And then he stood by the strangers, guarding them from bandits so they could eat safely. Abraham and Sarah did not hold back but gave their best selves, and their best gifts to offer. Friends, now is a time to do the same. The desire for security might leave you feeling like retreating and holding tightly to what you have. But risking, trying, daring, emptying yourselves is where you will find the exhilaration of the troubled waters. You simply can’t experience the jubilation if you don’t jump in.

Should you feel inclined to laugh as Sarah did, maybe as an “oh, please” scoff or a “yeah, right” expression of disbelief, remember that God is at work here. And what do we believe if not that there is nothing too wonderful for the Lord? Jump in, my friends - the water has been stirred.

Let us pray: Nothing is too wonderful for you, O Lord. Keep us confident in that truth, we pray. Amen.

² John 5:2-7.