

## **“Is Anything Too Wonderful for God?”**

**Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7**

**June 18, 2017**

### **Central Texas Metropolitan Community Church**

Laughter is important to your health...for lots of reasons. A good laugh relaxes your muscles for up to 45 minutes afterward. It decreases stress hormones and increases immune cells and infection-fighting antibodies. Laughter improves the function of blood vessels and increases blood flow, which can help protect you against a heart attack.

It's not only important to your physical health, but also to your mental health. It can draw your attention away from things that cause anger, guilt, and stress. And it allows you to see difficult situations with a new perspective, more like a challenge, rather than a threat.

And laughter plays an important role, as well, not only in this morning's scripture reading, but in its backstory. About six chapters earlier in the book of Genesis, God singles out Abraham for greatness, which involves Abraham leaving his homeland and relatives to go to Canaan, a land he has never even seen.

And God makes a three-fold promise to Abraham. First, God promises that Abraham will have a slew of descendants – enough to become a nation, in fact. Second, God promises that Canaan, this land to which Abraham is being called, will be an inheritance for his descendants. And third, God promises that Abraham will be blessed, and he and his descendants will in turn, be a blessing to others.

But there was one small problem. Abraham's wife, Sarah, was barren. It's hard to produce a nation of people when you're unable to give birth to a single child.

But if we fast-forward about 25 years, we find that Abraham and Sarah have indeed left their homeland and settled in Canaan. But there still aren't any children. And that's when God makes another appearance to Abraham, making the same promises that were made a quarter of a century earlier, saying, “I will give you a son by [Sarah]. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; rulers of peoples will come from her.”

And so Abraham couldn't hold back any longer, but instead broke out into a belly laugh. Scripture says he “fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, ‘Is a child to be born of a man who is 100 years old? And will Sarah bear a child at the age of 90?’”

Which brings us to this morning's text when three travelers appeared at Abraham's tent. It seems that one of them was God and the other two were angels, but all three of them were disguised as humans.

And whereas hospitality is quite literally a matter of life and death in that semi-arid climate, Abraham goes above and beyond the call of duty in his hosting of these guests. He begs them to allow him to provide water to soak their feet. He has Sarah quickly prepare some fresh-baked bread made from the choicest flour. And he scurries off as quickly as his 100-year-old legs will carry him to select the best and most tender calf to be butchered, prepared, and served up for the travelers, along with some fresh cheese and milk. And when he sets all this before the strangers, after eating, they ask, “Where is your wife Sarah?”

Well, as it turns out, Sarah is eavesdropping on the conversation from inside the tent entrance. And when God promises that she will bear a son in her post-menopausal years, Sarah, like Abraham before her, laughs and says to herself, “Now that I am so old and my husband even older, shall I have the pleasure of bearing a child?”

Or at least she thought she was laughing and speaking to herself. Apparently not, because God says, “Why does Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really deliver a child at my age?’” And God follows that question with another one on which the whole story hinges: “Is anything too wonderful for God?”

And so, sure enough, Sarah bears a child, and she names him Isaac, which translated means “laughter,” not because both she and her husband had been caught laughing at God's promise, but

because Sarah said, “Now God has given me laughter, and all who hear of this will laugh with me.”

Abraham laughed, Sarah laughed, and I can’t help but imagine God joining in their laughter with a divine snicker of her own at the impossibility of it all. Is anything too wonderful for God?

If a 34-year-old microbiologist working for the U.S. Geological Survey in Baton Rouge, LA had been told that 25 years later he would be serving as a minister in Waco, TX, like Abraham and Sarah, I would have fallen on my face laughing. If only five years ago, you had told me that I would be legally married to the man of my dreams, I would have probably busted out laughing at its unlikelihood. And if just a year ago, you had suggested that the introvert you see standing before you would be smudging ashes on the foreheads of dozens of strangers on a downtown street and assuring them that God loves them and that they make God very happy, I would have assured you that you have the wrong person. But is anything too wonderful for God?

God seems to have the quirkiest sense of humor in using the most unlikely people to fill the needs of the world. God singled out the eldest of five brothers born to the biggest bootleggers in South Florida, a self-labeled “religious fanatic,” who after an attempted suicide following a love affair, and after witnessing a close friend being arrested by the police at a Los Angeles gay bar, felt called to return to his faith and to offer a place for LGBTQ people to worship God freely, thus giving rise to Metropolitan Community Churches. It’s almost laughable, isn’t it?

I have witnessed God using this church to touch lives over the years, offering a place of worship to people who thought they had seen the last of religion. After being rejected by family and friends, and after being disillusioned by the hypocrisy of their own faith communities, they found a place that declares them to be very good in the sight of God. Is anything too wonderful for God?

I have seen people afraid to allow God to use them, afraid to trust that God has their back. People who live their lives in fear, limiting their daily routines only to familiar neighborhoods, hiding behind locked doors, and making sure their guns are always loaded, never understanding that there can be worse things than death, one of them being a life lived out in fear.

Yes, I have seen people who helplessly give into their fears, but I have seen even more people nurtured by this church who have burst upon the world, making an unbelievable impact on it. And I have seen very ordinary people going about their ordinary lives, yet providing a living testimony to a God who freely offers salvation and redemption and grace to everyone. People who have been blessed and who, in turn, offer the world a blessing.

I have lived long enough to witness some amazing things that can bring a smile to one’s face or give rise to laughter within one’s spirit. And when I look out at all of you, I ask myself, “Is anything too wonderful for God?” God has a plan for us – for you and me. God isn’t finished with us yet. In fact, I suspect that for many of us, God hasn’t even begun. But the only way God can use us is if we allow it. So go ahead and laugh if you want, but I believe God wants to use us to fulfill a dream that God has for the world. Go ahead and laugh, but then see what God can do!

May each of us experience holy laughter in response to the ways God is working in our lives. May we recognize the blessings which God has heaped upon us. And may we fulfill God’s dream for the world by being a blessing to others. Amen.