

"When God Makes You Laugh"

Genesis Series - "Decisive Moments"

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Trinitarian Congregational Church
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Genesis 18:9-15
Genesis 21:1-7

Genesis 18:9-15.

(Abraham is about to receive a message from God, given through 3 men.)

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

Genesis 21:1-7

The Lord dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Now Sarah said,

*"God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me."
And 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."*

The story of the birth of Isaac makes me think about laughter. Sarah laughs twice in these passages, and they were two very different kinds of laughter. There are a variety of laughs, aren't there? The best is the Belly Laugh - uncontrollable, from deep within, almost always shared with others. The opposite of the Belly Laugh is the Polite Laugh, a Pseudo Laugh, when a joke is not really funny but you feel you should laugh anyway. The Giggles are another unique form of laughter, often occurring at the most inappropriate times. I once was participating in a Good Friday Service, sitting in between two of my closest friends, also clergy. And something happened during the service that gave us the giggles. During the prayers I could feel the shoulders of the person next to me shaking, trying to suppress the giggles. We all agreed that it was one of the least spiritual moments of our lives.

We laugh most with other people. Although sometimes we can even laugh out loud when we're all alone. And different people have different sounding laughs. Elmo's laugh is different from Sponge Bob's. When my high school year book came out my Senior Year much to my surprise I was voted "Funniest Laugh." I said to my friends, "I don't have a funny laugh. Who voted for me? Who would nominate me?" They said, "We did." And then they laughed. And then they imitated my laugh. I had no idea. (And I've been scarred for life ever since!)

In our passages this morning Sarah laughs twice. The first time she laughs in disbelief. She laughs because something strikes her as very funny. She's told she's going to have a son. The passage says that Sarah was quite, "advance in age." And then it says that, "It had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women." I'm not sure exactly what that means, but I get the drift. Sarah says, "I am old. Abraham is old. You've got to be kidding me." And she laughed to herself.

She's almost laughing at God though, isn't she? Abraham believes that this message is from God. And in his mind he's having a dialogue with God, and within this dialogue God says to him - *"Why did Sarah laugh? Why didn't she believe the message about her having a child? Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?"* It seems like God's feelings are hurt, doesn't it? My first reaction to that is to think that the writer is humanizing God a bit too much, bringing God down to our size, ascribing a human emotion and a human reaction to the Almighty. But then I thought about the fact that we do disappoint God. Disappointment isn't just a human emotion. It can also be a Divine Emotion as well. The human race has done many things that hurt the heart of God.

I remember a TV commercial growing up. It featured a Native American and he's looking at what we've done to the rivers and streams his people had lived on, and a lone tear runs down his face. They used to run that ad constantly when I was growing up. I remember my Mother once saying, "I appreciate the message, but I just wish he'd stop crying." But it's an apt picture for God, because surely God has looked out upon the earth and shed many tears through the centuries, don't you think?

So, God's reaction here of being hurt gets us thinking about some good questions:

- What in the world today brings God joy?
- What in the world today brings God to tears?
- Is my life bringing God sadness or joy?
- How can I bring joy to God today?

So God's feelings being hurt isn't as far fetched as it first seems, especially given the fact that God has big plans for Abraham and Sarah. Remember Ch. 12:

"Abram, go from your country . . . to the land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing . . . in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Abraham and Sarah are to become the Patriarch and Matriarch of a very

large family, one that still exists today - the Jews.

- Abraham's told by God in Ch. 14 that his offspring will be like the dust particles of the earth, too numerous to count.

- In Ch. 15 God says to Abraham, "Look at the stars and count them. Your offspring will be like that."

- In Ch. 17 God says to Abraham, "Your name is Abram ("Great Father"), but your name shall now be called, Abraham ("Father of a Multitude").

Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai, your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah. I will bless her and give you a son by her. She will give rise to nations.

Then it says, "Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, "Can a child be born to a man who is 100? Can Sarah, who is 90, bear child?"

So Abraham has gone back and forth between believing and not believing. In Ch. 15 he believes. In Ch. 17 he laughs in disbelief. In Ch. 18 he believes again. Faith can be like that, can't it? Emily Dickinson wrote, *"We both believe and disbelieve a hundred times an hour, which keeps believing nimble."* - that's not such a bad thing.

Back to the story - Abraham has had numerous encounters with God up until this point (Ch. 18). 6 whole chapters worth in the book of Genesis. But apparently he didn't share any of it with Sarah. Sometimes we men do this. We think we've had the conversation, but it only occurred in our heads. - "Didn't I mention that?" So Sarah is hearing this for the first time - that she'll give birth to a son. And so, she laughs.

There's one other kind of laughter that I did not mention. It's the laughter that's used to cover up something, to hide something, like when we don't know the answer to a question. Sometimes the laughter is meant to hide great pain. Not having a child was one of the biggest hurts in Sarah's life. In ancient times and in agrarian societies it was very important for women to be able to conceive and present their husband with offspring. In fact it was so important that some of you know how Sarah compensated for the infertility. She gave her servant girl, Hagar, to Abraham as his wife. And Hagar conceived a son, Ishmael. Many people believe that the most Arabs descended from Ishmael. That would mean that

the Jews and the Muslims of the Middle East are all cousins, all children of Abraham. But for Sarah, seeing Abraham successfully have a child with her servant, was extremely painful. And there was strife between Sarah and Hagar from that moment on. - Sarah sent Hagar away into the wilderness twice, the second time for good. So when Sarah first hears she's going to have a son, she laughs to hide the pain.

I do love the conversation that takes place between Abraham and Sarah. "I didn't laugh," Sarah says. "Oh yes, you did laugh," replies Abraham. Clearly these kinds of conversations go back much further than we thought. And our communication skills have not evolved much since then.

Well, we read these words in Ch. 21 - *"The Lord dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised."* She conceived and bore Abraham a son. And then she knows a great form of laughter - the laughter that comes from pure joy. *"God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me."* (21:6) She names the child, Isaac, which means, *"Laughter."*

Sarah learns a great spiritual truth. God is even better than she thought. One of my favorite authors, Brian McLaren, puts it this way: *"No thought of God that you can ever have is too good. Nothing about God is too good to be true. You are safe when your thoughts of God grow greater. Don't be afraid."* When Sarah first heard of God's promised gift to her she didn't believe. She didn't think God could be that good.

God is bigger than our greatest thoughts about God. God is better than our highest thoughts about God. God is more brilliant than the best descriptions given by the wisest theologians who've ever lived. God is more majestic than the great poetry that's ever been written trying to describe God's majesty. Our best thoughts of God still fall short of who God really is. Just ask Sarah & Abraham. God is bigger and better than we can imagine.

J.B. Phillips wrote a book some years ago called, [Your God is Too Small](#). And in many ways that's the theme of this part of Genesis. The God we imagine is far greater than we ever thought.

Is your "God" too small?

Is God too small to intervene in your life?

- to fill you with Divine Power?

- to use you for Divine Purposes?

Is God too small to carry you through this time?

Is God too small to calm your fears?

Is God too small to give you heaven's peace?

Is God too small to forgive all your sins?

Is God too small to give you joy amid life's struggles, to give you hope
in the dark places?

God is always bigger and better than we think.

Think about the biggest concern you have right now in your life.

(it's usually the thing our minds wander off to)

Is God too small to intervene?

Is God too small to help?

Is God too small to bless you that you may be a blessing to others?

May God make you laugh. For that's the best laughter of all.

Amen.