



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for May 14, 2023
"By Faith: Sarah"
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Hebrews 11:11-12, Genesis 18:10-15

Laughter

Laughter is a wonderful way to express ourselves. It is good to laugh. We can express ourselves with laughter in ways that we can't do otherwise. Laughter is a lot like crying in that regard. Crying also helps us express what we can't do otherwise.

There are all kinds of laughter. Of course, there is laughter that happens in response to a good joke, a funny story. There's laughter of recognition. We recognize something about ourselves or someone else and laugh about it. There is even laughter that surprises us. We can't help ourselves. It just sort of comes over us.

I remember the scene from the show, *Seinfeld* where Jerry puts a PEZ dispenser on Elaine's purse during a concert. Elaine looks at it and absolutely loses it. She has to leave the auditorium laughing.

Be it known this is a PEZ Free Zone.

Let's consider yet another type of laughter. It is the laughter of disbelief. The laughter of disbelief comes when we just know that something we hear about or are faced with is seemingly impossible. We can do no other but laugh. My mom used to say, "*Sometimes it's better to laugh than to cry.*" The laughter of disbelief is simply a part of human experience.

We encounter it today in that wonderful account of Sarah hearing that she will soon give birth to a baby. The news was laugh worthy. After all, Sarah was ninety and her husband, Abraham, ninety-nine.

She heard the news upon overhearing three travelers talking with Abraham. Huddled in the background, she laughed to herself thinking no one would hear her. God heard and took the opportunity to teach her about his provision. We read about that in Genesis 18:10-15. Let's hear it now.

Genesis 18:10-15 (NIV)

Then one of them said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son."

Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?"

Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son."

Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh."

But he said, "Yes, you did laugh."

God's word for God's people.

Divine Possibilities

I had promised a couple of weeks ago that we would pick up the story of Sarah on Mother's Day. By the way, Happy Mother's Day to one and all.

The story of Sarah is a story about divine possibilities and a developing faith. Sarah had already lived a long life. She had been faithful to God all along. The news of her giving birth at age ninety was a stretch though, even for a person as faithful as she was.

Her faith still needed developing. That's the case for every one of us. Abraham was a man of faith, deep faith. Even he laughed upon hearing that he would have a son.

Genesis 17:17 has it that *"Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, 'Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old?'"*

A lot hinged on Abraham and Sarah having a child. The very covenant God made with Abraham depended upon that. God promised that Abraham would lead a great nation, and that his descendants would be as *"numerous as the stars in the night sky."*

No child, no descendants; it was as simple as that. There was one problem with that though, both Abraham and Sarah were well-beyond childbearing age. When they heard that God would finally deliver, they could do no other but laugh, both in relief and disbelief.

The fact that Abraham and Sarah were well-beyond childbearing age teaches us that we are never too old or too young, for that matter, to be used of God. The fact is this, nothing is impossible for the Lord.

The question is asked in the context of this story, *"Is anything too hard for the Lord?"* That question is asked in such a way so to elicit a hearty, *"no way."* There is nothing too hard for the Lord.

Mary and Elizabeth were assured of that when the angel told them, *"With God, nothing is impossible."* (Luke 1:37) Mary was a virgin and Elizabeth was old, and yet the angel told them, *"For nothing is impossible with God."* God is all about bringing about his *"divine possibilities."* Those things that come only by his hand.

I love the great truth that is a part of Campus Crusade for Christ's, *The Four Spiritual Laws*. *"God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life."*

Do you believe that?

Divine Possibilities in Family

Here on Mother's Day, we should be encouraged, among other things, about the *"divine possibilities"* in family.

"Is there anything too hard for the Lord?" is a good question to ask ourselves, particularly given everything our families face these days. Let's be honest, there is a lot facing our families these days. The pressures are abundant. There is so much that conspires to pull us apart. Our attention is on things other than the essential of nurturing our families. The pressure of work and school, the influence of social media, and the draw of a culture, that in so many ways, stands contrary to what we believe, challenge us to no end.

God though is present to help.

- He helps us persevere, if not, overcome.
- He offers direction, guidance, and good counsel.
- He has a way of steadying our hearts, calming our emotions, and giving us peace.

Our son, Brian, and his wife, Cassie, have three children all under the age of eight. Brian and Cassie both have jobs, are active at their church, and have their kids involved in all sorts of activities. They lead a pretty hectic life, not unlike so many young couples with families. Brian shared with me one day, *"We live with such a narrow margin of error everything has to go according to plan or things fall apart quickly."*

I have learned that it is not a perfect world, and we can't, quite honestly, can expect it to be.

Just this past week, Cheryl went down to Nashville to take one of Brian and Cassie's kids to her preschool's *Muffins with Mom*. Little Maggie was overjoyed that her Gigi was going to join her. The night before, just as Brian and Maggie were turning into the neighborhood after a long day, Maggie threw up all over the backseat of the car. No muffins with Maggie the next day. She recovered and had her muffins with Gigi on Friday. I am glad Cheryl was there to help.

It's not a perfect world when comes to family. With faith then, let's pray this simple prayer, *"Oh God, help us."*

How about repeating, *"I trust you, Jesus,"* as a way of reminding ourselves that he is worthy of our trust? You may even want to pray, *"Oh God, forgive me when I laugh in disbelief, instead of trusting you like I should."*

As Abraham and Sarah came to learn, *"Nothing is too hard for God."*

Faithfulness

When it comes to living *"by faith."* Ashlee began to turn our focus just a bit last week. Instead of putting all the focus on our faithfulness, we'd do well to consider the faithfulness of God. That's exactly what took place with Abraham and Sarah.

Hebrews 11:11 puts it this way. *"And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise."* (Hebrews 11:11)

God came through in a big way. He was faithful to deliver on what he had promised. Sarah experienced firsthand that God was worthy of her trust. *"She considered him faithful who had made the promise."*

In like fashion, Abraham had come to know God's provision as well. Remember he too had laughed when he heard that Sarah would give birth. From Hebrews 11:12 we read, *"And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore."* (Hebrews 11:12)

God proved himself faithful. What is highlighted here in this story about Abraham and Sarah is not so much their faith, but God's faithfulness.

Our faith wavers all the time. It's up and down, and sometimes even sideways. Our faith is a lot like a sapling blown by the wind. We are all over the place. God's faithfulness never, ever wavers.

"Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:22-23)

Too Wonderful

"Is anything too hard for the Lord?" How dare we laugh in disbelief at anything God is about to do. I love how the *New Revised Standard Version* of the Bible puts it, *"Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?"* (Genesis 18:14 NRSV)

The *New American Bible* puts it this way, *"Is anything too marvelous for the Lord?"* (Genesis 18:14 NAB) Absolutely not! God always shows himself worthy of our trust.

- It was that way for Abraham and Sarah.
- It's that way for our families.
- It's that way for those who live *"by faith"* holding fast to the faithfulness of God for their lives.