

Laughing at God  
 Genesis 18  
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 St. Michael's and All Angels, Cambridge Junction

May the God who creates us....  
 Good Morning!

What do you believe about God's call to you?  
 I look at scripture and I pause.  
 And what I see, is over and over again, is God calling, inviting, beckoning, flawed, frail human beings, to do more than they could ever ask or imagine.

Witness for a moment, Abram and Sari or as they eventually became known as Abraham and Sarah. Called by God for sure, but boyo boy, not without a blemish or two. There's Abraham, leaving his home, his land, his people, traveling through Egypt and getting worried that the Egyptian king will want to kill him, so he can be with Sari, his wife. So what's he suggest to her, "How about we pretend that you are my sister, that way the King won't need to kill me to sleep with you."

Or then there's Sarah, having heard God's promise that Abraham will have a son and his descendants will be more numerous than the stars in the sky. Sarah, does the math, and she sees that she's pushing 90 and not much has happened and even less is likely to come forth, so she suggests that Hagar her maid, have sex with Abraham, so he might get a child that way. Then what happens when Hagar becomes pregnant and gives birth to Ishmael—well then Sari is massively mean to both of them and pretty dismissive of Abraham. Seemingly forgetting that this was all her idea...

[And yes friends, it is scriptural passages such as these that always make me pause when I hear some politicians saying that what we need to do is return to biblical family values.... And I always think to myself---have you even read the bible? But that's a different sermon.]

What does God's call mean? God may have promised blessings and descendants, but things are not really looking up for them at this point. Is their hope?

Or for us, maybe what we thought our lives were going to be, or who we thought were going to be with us—that may be changing— some of it all may be very much up in the air. And we may think why in heaven's name did I ever decide to go in this direction?

And I wonder, if in our congregations, we might sometimes feel this way? Particularly in our congregations in the midst of a leadership transition, beloved clergy leaving, or a talented warden or treasurer stepping down, a new priest being called. And folks saying, "Is this what we are supposed to be doing? Is this how it's supposed to be going? Has God momentarily forgotten us? Are we really supposed to trust?"

And much of us trusting, maybe that also means we should trust, but maybe we should like Sarah try to move things along in our own manner? And how in heaven's name can we be the one's upon--- whom God is counting?

And I go back... to Abraham and Sarah camped at the Oaks of Mamre. In the heat of the day, sitting at the entrance of their tent, with the flaps open, when three visitors appear out of the wilderness, and Abraham goes to greet them. Begs them to come and stay, be refreshed and fed. Then he runs back quickly to Sari—quick get some flour, mix with water, you know how to do this; mix it, knead it, bake it. Then off he skitters to the cattle pen and picks out nice fat one, so that these random visitors may be fed.

Hospitality is given and received. The visitors, who we are told by the narrator are messengers of God, and after eating and drinking they then make some audaciously hopeful predictions. They say, "Well you know what, next time next year when we appear on the horizon, your wife Sarah will have a son."

Well Sarah hears these words, and she chuckles to herself: I'm ancient and my spry husband is even older. Like that's ever going to happen. But the visitors stick their heads in the tent and say, "We heard you laugh."

Ever polite Sarah replies, "oh no not me, I didn't laugh."

"Oh, but you did," then the visitor asks, "Is anything too hard for God?"

And I find myself saying aloud that very question to myself and to all of us: "Is anything too hard for God?"

Look around at your current situation, in your life, in your community of faith and wonder with me, "Is anything too hard for God?"

Biblical Theologian Walter Brueggemann says in his Genesis Commentary, "Is God's sovereign power limited to our expectations?" (*Interpretation Commentary: Genesis* p 160)

Brueggeman continues, "[If we answer,] Yes, some things are too hard, they are impossible for God...Then we have determined to live in a closed universe where things are stable, reliable and hopeless." P 159.

But what if we were to open ourselves to the audacity embodied hopefulness of God being active in our lives and in our communities? What if we are to admit, that this is not exactly how we thought this would all play out, but we will still live and move and have our being with the Holy of Holies alive and active in our lives? Not what we thought, but come Holy Spirit come.

I find that there are moments in my life, when I feel completely open to the Spirit, excited to see what will soon be revealed. I have times when I am perfectly happy to have things move on God's time, and not mine. But I must admit this openness and calm grounded

expectation is not always my *modes operandi*, one need only ask my spouse Susan, or my spiritual director, my close friends, or my therapist.

I too find myself laughing at the notion that God might do something amazing in my life. I chuckle and like Sarah go back to kneading and baking my bread.

But then, the presence of the Spirit makes herself known.

As someone walks into my office with an idea, I've been toying with. Or I'm on a zoom call, of all places and someone offers an amazing idea that moves an entire virtual room of people toward real ministry. Or, an entire legislature shifts and what we thought was impossible is suddenly being signed into law.

What I take away from these reflections and from our story from Abraham and Sarah—is that the key to seeing God working in our lives, hearing God's call, appreciating the presence of the Holy Spirit, is to be open.

To sit, metaphorically at the front of my tent. To be observant and open to what surprising person or event may be appearing on the horizon and then to entertain those messengers from God with the best hospitality I can muster.

At least then, I'll hear what the Spirit is saying. I may laugh, I may laugh aloud at the utter absurdity, or I may chuckle quietly to myself, but like Abraham and Sarah I will have heard God's word. So that I might prepare, so that I might prepare, for all things are possible with God.

This then is my prayer, may I be open to what God is saying, may we all be open to God's call to us. Even if at first, it makes us laugh!

Amen.