

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 2nd Sunday After Pentecost, June 18, 2017

You Must Be Kidding!

June 18, 2017

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

Have you ever been relaxing at home on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon when the doorbell rings? You look out of the window and exclaim to yourself, "You must be kidding." You see three folks at the door whom you haven't seen for years. You open the door and greet them and ask what brings them to your home.

They live in another state and say, "We were driving by on I-40 and remembered that you lived here in Marion, so we decided to gamble that you might be home."

It had been years since you last saw these folks and you don't even exchange Christmas cards anymore, but here they are at your door.

It's late in the afternoon and you don't see how you can avoid inviting them to dinner and to stay the night. You do invite them and they accept. You think, "You must be kidding" and wonder what you can prepare for dinner for them. You were planning on leftovers for yourself but that won't do for guests, even unexpected ones, so you go to the fridge to check and say to yourself "You must be kidding" for you don't have anything suitable.

You rush out to Ingles and pick up some steaks that you can grill. You have not purchased steaks in a while. When you check out and the cashier tells you what you owe, you think "You must be kidding." Steaks aren't cheap but grilling doesn't take any real preparation so you take the steaks home for your unexpected guests.

Abraham was in a similar quandary in our scripture reading. He was relaxing by his tent and sees three strangers arrive. He also must have thought, "You must be kidding." He doesn't know who they are but he is socially obligated to welcome them and give them hospitality. In those days there were few inns and places to eat or stay, so strangers were never turned away.

Do you see the similarity of the two situations --- your unexpected three guests and Abraham's three guests? At least Abraham knew that they wouldn't be overnight guests as was the case with your three guests but he still needed to provide a meal for them.

Abraham was not surprised at them arriving. Travelers commonly were given hospitality and were a common sight. He offers them food and drink and hastens into his tent and tells Sarah to prepare bread for the guests. He then runs to his herd of animals, selects a calf, and asks a servant to butcher and prepare it.

Then, when the meal is ready Abraham sits with his guests under a tree where they eat. Of course Sarah remained in the tent and does not join them. The culture of the times was such that women did not join male guests in such a situation.

Then the guests ask, *"Where is your wife Sarah?"* How did they know her name? Abraham had not told them but he says *"There, in the tent"* and asks himself "How do they know Sarah's name? Who are these guys anyhow?"

Then one of them says, *"I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son."* Abraham thinks, "You must be kidding."

At this point, Abraham realizes who these men are --- representatives of God. Some theologians have even gone so far as to suggest that they were the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit but there is nothing in the scripture to suggest that, nothing at all --- but in any event they clearly are God's representatives.

Sarah meanwhile has remained in the tent out of sight but she overhears the statement that she will give birth to a son and begins laughing to herself, "You must be kidding. Abraham and I are very old, well past childbearing age." *"After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure."* "It is ludicrous."

How could the men know Sarah's name? Even if they had inquired elsewhere about the identity of the couple living in the tent, it is highly unlikely that they would have asked her name. The fact that they know her name must only have been since they were God's representatives, or possibly that the one saying that she would give birth to a son was Yahweh God, or else Yahweh was speaking through him.

Sarah laughed to herself and Yahweh asks why Sarah laughed and thought that she was too old to have a child.

Sarah was afraid and lied, denying that she had laughed but Yahweh says, "Yes, you did laugh." He asks, *"Is anything too hard for the Lord?"* Anything indeed!

Sarah did conceive a son and one year later gave birth to Isaac whose name in Hebrew means. "He laughs."

God had promised Abraham that he would be the father of nations, a promise

likely forgotten as he and Sarah grew old.

In Genesis 15, we read the God told Abraham that, “... a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir ... Look up at the sky and count the stars --- if indeed you can count them ... So shall your offspring be.” This was God’s covenant with Abraham. God had not forgotten although Abraham most likely had.

These Days (January 25, 2014) said, “Sarah and Abraham had all but given up on the future. They dreamed of having a family. But they were now advanced in years, and it seemed unlikely that such a dream would ever come true.

“When the Lord announced that ... Sarah would bear a child, she thought the idea laughable. Her lack of faith prompted the question, ‘Is anything too hard for the Lord?’

“Sure enough, Sarah later gave birth to a son. She laughed again, this time not from doubt but from joy. Sarah’s son carried God’s promise of another Son, ‘born of a woman, born under the law’ (Galatians 4.4) to a young woman named Mary.”

(All These Days Bible quotes have been changed to the NIV version of the Bible).

As Walter Bruggemann, et al ⁽¹⁾ said, “God’s word is true, In spite of threats to the word posed by human sinfulness (e.g. Sarah’s doubt) and by human weakness (Abraham’s and Sarah’s old age), God protects the word and brings the word to fruition.”

Sarah and Abraham said, “You must be kidding” when Yahweh God spoke but God kept his word. Has God ever spoken to you? Did you believe him or did you say, “You must be kidding.”

God spoke to me multiple times telling me, an old retired engineer, to go into the ministry. I kept saying “You must be kidding.” He wasn’t and I eventually listened and did as he told me to do.

When God speaks to you, don’t laugh. Don’t say, “You must be kidding.” Do what God asks and believe what God is saying to you. God doesn’t say something unless he means it and expects you to listen and act accordingly.

Amen.

1. Walter Bruggemann, et al, “Texts for Preaching - Year A,” Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 1995.

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Liturgical color - green

**This is the day the Lord has made.
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

Announcements

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

Many: And also with you.

Call to Worship

Jesus Christ summons us
to answer God's call of mercy.
Christ gathers us and gives us power
to be healed and to heal,
to be forgiven and to forgive,
to be freed from sin and to set others free,
to tell one another and the world:
God's presence is at hand.
Let us worship God.

*Opening Hymn "Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!" #138

Opening Prayer

God of wonder,
you appeared to Abraham as three persons;
you reveal your fullness
in your Son Jesus Christ.
Your Spirit fills your people with hope

through the peacemaking cross of Jesus.
Gather us as Christ's faithful disciples
and empower us with his good news,
in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Prayer Response Inside front cover of hymnal – In Unison
*Hear Our Prayer, O Lord, Hear Our Prayer, O Lord, Incline Thine ear to us, And grant us Thy peace. **Amen.***

Psalm of Praise Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19. Pew Bible page 955.

¹ I love the LORD, for he heard my voice;
he heard my cry for mercy.
² Because he turned his ear to me,
I will call on him as long as I live.
¹² What shall I return to the LORD
for all his goodness to me?
¹³ I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the LORD.
¹⁴ I will fulfill my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people.
¹⁵ Precious in the sight of the LORD
is the death of his faithful servants.
¹⁶ Truly I am your servant, LORD;
I serve you just as my mother did;
you have freed me from my chains.
¹⁷ I will sacrifice a thank offering to you
and call on the name of the LORD.
¹⁸ I will fulfill my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all his people,
¹⁹ in the courts of the house of the LORD—
in your midst, Jerusalem.

Praise the LORD.

Call to Confession

The mystery of God brings the promise of life,
but we doubt the Spirit's power to overcome death.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son,
reveals that nothing is impossible with God.

Let us confess our sin and receive new life.

Prayer of Confession (Unison)

Triune God,

Holy Three, Holy One,

**we confess that we do not know
how to look for you.**

**We do not sense your nearness,
and if there are angels among us,
we are unaware.**

**We do not show the hospitality to strangers
that Abraham showed to you.**

**We do not trust that our hardships
can be transformed by your Spirit.**

O Covenant-keeper, forgive us.

**Let us laugh with joy
because your grace has made peace among us.**

**Send us out with this good news
so that others will also receive your blessing;
through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

Assurance of God's Pardon (Responsive)

Christ gave his life
to save us from the wrath of God.

**Therefore, since we are justified by faith,
we have peace with God
through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Trust the good news of the gospel:
in Jesus Christ our sins are forgiven.

*Gloria Patri #579– In Unison

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen

Children’s’ Message

Prayer for Illumination

God of redemption,
summon us to Sarah’s joy,
Abraham’s wonder,
and Paul’s confident hope
through the word and work of the Good Shepherd,
Jesus Christ our Lord,
in whose name we pray. **Amen.**

Old Testament Lesson Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7, Pew Bible, pages 24-25 and 29

18 The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. ² Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

³ He said, “If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord,^[a] do not pass your servant by.

⁴ Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. ⁵ Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant.”

“Very well,” they answered, “do as you say.”

⁶ So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. “Quick,” he said, “get three seahs^[b] of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread.”

⁷ Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. ⁸ He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had

been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.

⁹ “Where is your wife Sarah?” they asked him.

“There, in the tent,” he said.

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, “After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?”

¹³ Then the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’ ¹⁴ Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.”

¹⁵ Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, “I did not laugh.”

But he said, “Yes, you did laugh.”

²¹ Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. ² Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. ³ Abraham gave the name Isaac^[a] to the son Sarah bore him. ⁴ When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. ⁵ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

⁶ Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.” ⁷ And she added, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

*Congregational Hymn “To God Be the Glory” #485

Sermon

“You Must Be Kidding!”

Dr. Kenneth Humphreys

Anthem "It is Well With My Soul", Newsboys, Hallelujah for the Cross (© 2014 First Company Management. Used by Permission. CCLI License 11224027) (CD 25, Tr. 5)

*Affirmation of Faith *From "A Declaration of Faith" Presbyterian Church USA.* (Unison)

**The church's story with God did not end
with the latest events recorded in Scripture.
Across the centuries the company of believers
has continued its pilgrimage with the Lord of history.
It is a record of faith and faithlessness, glory and shame.
The church has been persecuted by hostile societies,
but it has also known times of privilege and power
when it joined forces with dominant cultures.
It has sought holiness
through separation from society,
as well as through involvement in the world's affairs.
It has experienced life-giving reformations.
It has known missionary expansion throughout the world,
but also periods of dwindling resources and influence.
It has divided into rival orders, sects and denominations,
but it has also labored for cooperation and union.
We confess we are heirs of this whole story.
We are charged to remember our past,
to be warned and encouraged by it,
but not to live it again.
Now is the time of our testing
as God's story with the church moves forward through us.
We are called to live now as God's servants
in the service of people everywhere. Amen.**

Tithes and Offerings

Jesus gathered the disciples
and gave them authority
to heal the sick, cast out evil, and proclaim the good news.
Let us present our offerings
for the mission of the church,
bearing witness to the kingdom of God.

*Doxology #592 – In Unison

Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him, all creatures here below; Praise Him above, ye heavenly host: Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer

[Silence is kept between petitions.]

Eternal, birthing God,
you bring all things visible and invisible into being.
We pray for the earth you created. . . . *[silence]*
Your Spirit brooded over creation like a mother bird.
Heal the oceans' dead zones,
the rain forests' slashed and burnt scars,
and the gashed firmament.
Lead your people to be good shepherds
of your world's life.
We pray for all people of the earth. . . . *[silence]*
You placed Adam and Eve in your Eden
to live together in happiness and mutual caring—
earthling and life-bearer corresponding to one another
and living in love with you.
Bring your peace, justice, and compassion
to every household, village, city, and nation.
Bind up the wounds of racial hatred;
break the bows of poverty, disease, and hunger;

Speak your "Be still!" to wars of religion and ideology.

We pray for women and children. . . . *[silence]*

Eve bore Cain with your help
and Sarah gave birth to laughter.

Protect women during pregnancy, childbirth,
and child rearing.

Provide safe homes and safe workplaces,
safe health care and safe nations,
where life is received with joy
and nurtured to maturity.

We pray for women whom you call
to other missions. . . . *[silence]*

You called the prophet Miriam
to dance and sing on the shores of victory
and Judge Deborah to lead Israel out of
Canaan's grasp.

The risen Lord called Mary Magdalene
and sent her to be the first eyewitness apostle.

Grant your people wisdom
to respect the gifts you give for the common good.

We pray for you to bring the fullness of the age
you promise. . . . *[silence]*

Holy Trinity, giver of love, life, and future,
we cannot dream what you see;
we cannot imagine what you can do.

Help us to be patient and faithful as we look forward
to the new life you began and will complete
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
in whose name we pray. **Amen.**

Let us pray now as our Lord taught us, **Our Father... Amen.**

*Closing Hymn

"Ye Servants of God, Your Master Proclaim" #477

*Charge and Blessing

[The sign of the cross may be made three times.]

Live without fear of the wrath of God.

Live in the peace of Christ.

Live in the hope of the Spirit.

The three persons of the Trinity surround you.

The hand of God keep you from all harm;

the Spirit of God guide you in all joy;

the Son of God deliver you to eternal life.