

An adaptation of Genesis 17:15-18:15

Narrator: God said to Abraham,

People: As for Sarai your wife, from now on you shall call her ‘Sarah.’ I will bless her and give you a son by her. She will be a mother to nations; kings will come from her.

Abraham: (falling on his face and laughing) Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?’

Narrator: Later, when Abraham was at the oaks of Mamre, sitting at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day, the Lord appeared to him in the form of three persons. Abraham ran to meet them.

Abraham: (Bowing down in front of the congregation) My Lord, if I have found favor with you, don’t leave here. Stay here. Rest. Have something to eat. And then be on your way.

People: Let it be so.

Narrator: Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said,

Abraham: Honey, we have guests for dinner.

Narrator: Abraham and Sarah prepared the food, then Abraham served it to the three persons as they sat in the shade of one of the trees. They said to him,

People: Where is your wife Sarah?

Abraham: There, in the tent.

People: When I return, your wife Sarah will have a son.

Narrator: Sarah was listening at the tent entrance and started laughing because she and Abraham were both very old. Then the Lord said to Abraham,

People: Why did Sarah laugh? Why does she think she’s too old? Is anything impossible for God? When I return, Sarah shall have a son.

It all comes home.

I love the book of Genesis, and one reason I love it is that we come across so many close encounters with God. From the beginning, when God is described as one who used to walk with man and woman through the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day. He talks to Cain before and

after Cain murders his brother Abel. God talks to Noah. And then we have God speaking to Abraham. Sometimes it's out of the blue, as if a voice came out of the sky. And then there are times like those in today's lesson where God appears as three men, and tells Abraham and his wife Sarah that they're going to have a baby, and that baby is going to be special, because Abraham and Sarah are special. They're going to be the parents of nations. They are going to be the founders of three of the world's major religions.

And it's worth noting that it all starts with family. The story of creation that we read last week culminates with the creation of a single man and a single woman, made in the image and likeness of God, and unlike all the other creatures on the planet God speaks to them, and the first commandment that he gives them is to raise a family. When things start falling apart, God decides to start from scratch with a single family. And in today's lesson we once again find a single man and a single woman called by God to lead the entire human race in a new direction, to start a new religion, and it all begins with family.

The only problem is that Abraham and Sarah are too old to be starting a family. They want to; that talk to God about it, and when God says, "Sarah's going to have a baby, they *laugh* about it. I don't know if it was a hearty chuckle so much as it was a cynical sneer, the kind of laugh you would have heard when Jesus told a crowd gathered around the body of a little girl that the girl was not dead yet, the kind of laugh that Nathaniel would have laughed when Philip told him that he had found the Messiah who hailed from Nazareth ("Can anything good come from Nazareth?"). It's the kind of laugh that we might make when a candidate says that things are going to be so much better after he or she is elected after we've heard candidate after candidate say the same thing and things have only gotten worse for us. Abraham and Sarah laughed at what God had said because it was just too unbelievable, too good to be true. It was a cynical laugh because being as old as they were Abraham and Sarah had resigned themselves to the fact that a family was out of the question. They had lost hope. And against all their doubts God nonetheless promises that their wish will be fulfilled, that they're going to have a baby.

Let's face it; for most of us our greatest desire is to have a family. Our greatest joys in life center around the family. And our greatest grief relates to family as well. I've prayed with some of you that you would have a family. I've prayed with others that your family would stay together. Family takes precedence over job, over school, even over health issues. Family is central to our lives, or in terms of our worship series, *family is the focus of our mission*. We could be evangelists on fire for Jesus Christ, spreading the good news of God's kingdom and making disciples everywhere we go, but we won't know true joy if our own children are alienated from us. We could be pillars of the church, heads of committees and worship leaders, but all those accolades mean nothing compared to knowing the love of your spouse and your children. And if there is a crisis or a family emergency, I know that you would not hesitate to walk out of church right now to be with family. God created us to have family as the focus of our lives.

Which is why it is so important that your faith in Jesus Christ be played out in your home. And fathers, mothers, you know that it's not so much your pastor or your church family who is going

to make a spiritual difference in your children's lives; it's you! Your children will reflect what is good about you and what is bad about you. Your children will reflect your level of faith. If you are cynical and pessimistic about the world, your children will likely grow up cynical and pessimistic about the world. On the other hand, if you believe that all things are possible with a God who is infinitely loving, infinitely gracious, infinitely forgiving, and that life is eternal in Christ, your children will most likely grow up to embrace that faith – I say “grow up to” because as any seasoned parent knows children do go through phases, times when they challenge the belief that has been handed down to them. But if you live a life of steadfast faith, of commitment to the God that you love and serve, your children will follow in your footsteps.

If we look upon Abraham and Sarah as the first family of faith, we could trace their ancestry down to three major religions today, to billions of people who profess faith in one God and who raise their families in that faith. And the Bible shows us where folks strayed away from the faith; I love the story of Jacob, who I think a lot of us can relate to, a fellow who goes through half his life not even mentioning God and conning people out of property and wealth. He's Abraham and Sarah's grandson. And we see that Jacob's imperfections are evident in his son's imperfections as eleven of them sell the twelfth into slavery then tell their dad that he's been killed. What goes around comes around.

So as our church works to discern mission, to explore where God is moving us as a church, we have to realize that such a movement depends entirely upon what's happening in your homes. Because mission involves people, and people belong to families, and families are vital to mission. One of the most beautiful things I've ever seen is a family that worships and serves God together, whether it be in church or in Haiti or in a homeless shelter. It starts with the family.

So how are things going with your family? I ask you to think about that now. Are there things that need to be forgiven? Are there things you need to change in your life to help tighten relationships between you and your children? Do you believe that all things are possible with God, and is that faith evident to your children?