

The Ninth Sunday of Pentecost

July 17, 2016

Prayer of the Day: Grant us, Lord, the spirit to think and do what is right that we, who cannot do anything that is good without you, may by your help be enabled to live according to your will; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! My Word will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. Alleluia! (Isaiah 55:11)

Sermon Text: Genesis 18:1-14

Our sermon reading comes from Genesis 18:1-14. Verses 1-10 were read earlier in our service. Included for our hearing are verses 10-14:

¹⁰ Then the LORD 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 old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my master 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."

Genesis 18:1-14

¹ 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, 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 of fine 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.

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What wonderful words, right? God promises old-man Abraham and old-woman Sarah that they will finally have their long-awaited baby— and all within a year! If you have ever waited for a child, you can just imagine their sheer joy. They now know for certain that they will have a family! So, it sounds out of place when God makes such a tremendous promise only to have Sarah laugh at it.

Have you ever told yourself: “I have heard that [promise] before!” (Now that another presidential election cycle has begun, I am sure you will hear many familiar promises made again). Sarah, quite frankly, had heard God’s promise before.

The first time God promises Abraham a son, Abraham is 75 years-old. Not only does God promise a child, but he guarantees that the Savior of the world will come through Abraham’s bloodlines (Genesis 12:3).

You can just imagine how excited Abraham is to share the news with Sarah. If Jesus is to come through Abraham’s family tree, then Abraham must have a son! No more waiting! They would get the child they always dreamt of having! You can picture them preparing a nursery. You can hear Abraham asking every day how Sarah feels. You can see the two of them staring at an empty cradle, waiting— and waiting and waiting— and still waiting for a child.

Frustrations build with each passing day. Abraham is a family business. Understand, he is not just one wandering nomad with a tent, a wife, and a couple servants. No, he roams the desert with a herd of cattle that can dot the landscape. He can buy just about anything he wants. He is a small city, with hundreds of servants and a functioning army of 318 fighting men! (Genesis 14:14). Without a child, no blood-descendent would inherit his vast fortune.

Abraham knows this. He even cries out to God that he would have to give everything he gained away to a trusted servant! (Genesis 15:2).

Again, God steps in and assures Abraham that he would have a child (15:4-5). Again, Abraham shares this happy news with Sarah. Again, they stare at the nursery walls. Again, Sarah checks her health. Again, they stare at the cradle. Again, they wait— and wait and wait. They wait 10 years— and still no child.

Abraham is now 85 years-old and Sarah is 74 years-old. She looks at herself in the mirror, knowing full well that she is not getting any younger and the likelihood of her producing a child is not going to happen. So, she does what feels right to her. She persuades Abraham to have a child with her maidservant. This child could be a kind of step-son to the family fortune and the promised Savior (16:1-2).

Once again God steps in and restates his intention to give a son to Abraham and Sarah. Once again, Abraham and Sarah look forward to cradling a child of their own. In fact, they spend the next 15 years waiting for this child— and still nothing! No matter how good the promise is, it just sounds like God is making a promise he cannot keep. Even if God’s intentions are well-meaning, it just looks like he cannot keep his Word.

So, when Sarah hears one of the three visitors say: **“I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son,”** she laughs! She has heard this one four times before! This time she is not going to believe it.

Instead of getting her hopes up, she lists off all these reasons God's promise cannot possibly work. Sarah's body is **worn out!** Women usually do not have children after age 40. **Sarah [is] past the age of childbearing.** Not to mention, her master, Abraham, is 99 years-old. He could not father a child; his body is as good as dead (Romans 4:19). As if age was not a challenge, Sarah is barren (Genesis 16:1). She examines the hardship confronting her and judges that God is wrong.

That is easy to do, right? Like Sarah, you see so many hardships in your life. Maybe those hardships are not going away. So, when you read God's promises to fix hardship and you see they are not better, you can assume that God is not capable of keeping his promise. I mean, the sight of your lingering illness can leave you wondering if God is really watching over your body. The sight of violence and chaos may have you challenge God's promise that he is truly in control of the world. The sight of money challenges can lead you to believe that God has not "Given you your daily bread." Those hardships can make you just like Sarah—scoffing, laughing at the very sound of God's promises. You hear good words, but doubt they will happen!

Sarah's laugh might have sounded innocent, but God saw right through it. **"Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?'"** Why did Sarah laugh? Because she believed she knew the workings of her body better than the Almighty God! She looked at her age and barrenness and told God that he does not understand how people make a child! She, the creature, declared that the Creator has no power to bring a child into her life. Sarah was not chuckling from excitement; she was laughing out of unbelief! She found it ridiculous that God would make a promise, but appear to have no power to make it happen.

The God who read Sarah's heart is the same God who understands the very thoughts of your heart. Those who laugh at God's promises are really doubting his power. Those who doubt his power, call God a liar who says good things, but cannot do those things. The only difference between us and Sarah is that Sarah physically laughed in God's face!

With love pumping from his heart, God simply asks: **"Is anything too hard for the LORD?"** Even in life's hardest of times, hardship can never, ever overwhelm your God.

God promised Abraham and Sarah a son— and not just any son, but his very own Son. Abraham is not the first person to hear this promise. Adam and Eve heard it about 2,000 years earlier! (Genesis 3:15) Abraham is not the last person to hear the promise either. Over the next 2,000 years, God promised Jesus to humble women and exalted kings, to people living in Jerusalem and to people forced out of Jerusalem. Finally, when the time had fully come, the virgin Mary gave birth to the Son of God (Galatians 4:4-5).

God did something even more difficult than sending Jesus into the world. He sent Jesus to conquer sin.

The greatest hardship you confront in life is the wages of sin. You see the effects of sin every single day. Jesus saw the effects too. Masses whisk their sick loved ones to Jesus' feet. Beggars cry out for his mercy. Victims search for answers as to why their governor, Pontius Pilate killed innocent people and mixed their blood with sacrifices. Yet, he does

not come to remove the symptoms of sin; he deals directly with sin— just as God promised.

Jesus is crucified for the entire world to see. The Lamb of God is pierced for our transgressions. His body is crushed for our iniquity. No one can doubt that. Eyewitnesses record these events so that you know the punishment you deserve for a mistrust of God has been paid in full by Jesus.

Jesus did not enter this world because being a Savior sounded good. He did not just promise to remove your sin. He actually removed it. He died and then his body regained life. He left the tomb and entered heaven. He did all of this to guarantee that you stand forgiven before God.

IS ANYTHING TOO HARD FOR THE LORD? Look to the cross. If Jesus has freed you from hell's bondage, then what can he not do? **NOTHING IS TOO HARD FOR THE LORD!**

You know it is not. You see, if God kept his promise to send Jesus into the world, then it means that God kept his promise to Abraham. In the words that follow our reading, you hear: *Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and he did for Sarah what he had promised* (Genesis 21:1). Twenty-five years after first promising Abraham and Sarah a son, God gave them a child. **NOTHING IS TOO HARD FOR THE LORD!**

That is good to know. You see, so often it is difficult to trust God because it means putting your life into his hands. You face this constant uneasiness because you want to know the future. You want to know what your life will look like. You want to know that your money situation will be fine. You want to know that you will still have a house and clothing— and personal luxuries or vacations. You want to know what tragedies to expect. You want to know how you will overcome hardships.

The truth is, God has not revealed the future to you. What he has revealed are his promises to watch over you now and in the future. That is why God has taken great pains to ensure that his Word is available for you to read. When you read the Bible, it is as if you are reading God's own diary. He appointed certain men to write down his Words. He has sent lovers of his Word to keep it free from mistakes. He has allowed technology to mass produce it. He has given you the ability to read and hear it. He has done all this so that you can discover his promises and trust him.

So, when life seems confusing, full of questions, or exhausting, turn to God's Word. Drink deeply from God's comfort, teaching you that everything is under his control. Rest trusting that God, who has given you house, food, and clothing up to this day, will continue doing just that. Discover renewed peace in knowing that violence will never separate you from heaven.

Yes, sometimes God's promises appear unbelievable. They may appear slow in coming. They may even look laughable. Yet, God gave a 99 year-old man and 89 year-old woman a baby boy. God spread out that family tree so that Jesus could enter. He raised his Son from the dead to declare you and me forgiven from sin. Then, he received Jesus into heaven and placed all authority into his hands. If God can do that great thing, **IS ANYTHING TOO HARD FOR THE LORD?**