

Sermon for 14 June 2020 @ Bethesda

Second Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: Genesis 18:1-15, (21:1-7); Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; Romans 5:1-8; Matthew 9:35-10:8, (9-23)

“Oh yes, you did laugh.”

Well!

At last we're done with the special teaching Sundays: the long, somber weeks of Lent; Easter and its Great Fifty Days; Pentecost; Trinity ... and now we're ready to settle back into "ordinary time!" This nice, quiet section of the Christian Year stretches through the summer and into the fall and up until just before Thanksgiving...so now we can stick to current events, or some special series that applies to us and our lives And what do we find?

We're stuck with Father Abraham!

Here he is, out in the middle of the desert, watching three strangers approach his tent from nowhere And like a good Bedouin host, what does he do?

He rushes towards the strangers and invites them in as highly welcome guests.

So many connections! Already we're back to applying basics: Our biblical ancestors were highly hospitable hosts. So many times in scripture we find ourselves seated at a meal, generously welcoming strangers ...

Indeed, one of the weirdest experiences of American Christianity lately has been the opposite ... watching our leadership, including a good part of our openly practicing religious community, totally opposing the welcoming of the stranger as a way of life, and watching the media and our political leadership acting as though that were the most natural, traditional pose in the world for good U.S. citizens.

Well, you've studied and prayed over the lessons for today, and you know the story ... and so you're ready for the sermon title, "Oh yes, you did laugh!"

Sarah laughed ... and then denied it, "for she was afraid."

That's where we are at the beginning of this long, uninterrupted period of Bible study we're just entering. God is watching us, hearing us laugh at the impossibility of joy, and stimulation of the most physical kind ... at the very intimations of a new turn in our history ... and lo and behold, the Holy Spirit, God within us, Christ alive in the fundamental readings and assumptions of our faith ... life itself, is insisting these crazy dreams, these impossible hopes, are the real thing!

I put it this way because of the absolutely outlandish Gospel ideas our Matthew reading surrounds us with. All sorts of unscientific, impractical, fanciful words spill out of the chapter that starts our New Testament insights for this long summer season stretching into the fall. “I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves,” Jesus tells the disciples. Barely converted, just beginning their attachment to him from out of the blue, they ... we ... find ourselves assigned to tasks such as “Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons....”

What possible connection can this have with you and me and the summer of 2020?

Can we deny we react like Sarah? And yet, have we time for anything less exotic, less astounding?

My sisters and brothers in Christ, I have no more inspiration, no more instructions, no fuller explanations than these unbelievable words and this unbelievable, laughable old tale from long ago and far across the ancient and uninviting desert.

This is our time to be alive! When the empire is crumbling and the young doubt the dreams of the old; when new hope springs up in the strangest places, and we're teased by the examples of love and courage that shine into all our nights and days; when things really are bad, and traditions of honesty at the top and cooperation @ every level below are being broken; when scam is a new word for an old and basic lie from top to bottom; when new life keeps showing up, both among the faithful workers who stay @ their jobs of healing, and of steadying righteousness in the land, and justice for the afflicted... and in beautiful acts of courage that spring up spontaneously in the least expected places; when the only sensible language we have is the language of dreams and promises and hope beyond present observing ... that's all I have.

We are God's people. We welcome the stranger who turns into the Lord of the universe; we bear the burden of justice through our moment, and hear the assignment, the call, to bear good fruit, to be salt of the earth, to do unbelievable things through and with the believable God of us all.

We are here. We are sent. We are learning. We are among friends.

“Oh yes, you did laugh!”

Repent, and believe the Gospel.

Amen.