

rePOSE - SARAH - EAVESDROPPING TO EVASION  
A SERMON BASED ON GENESIS 18:1-15  
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO  
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2019  
10:00 a.m.

On the one hand,  
you can't really blame Sarah for laughing.

Abraham and his people and herds were resting

at the oasis of Mamre (mam ree)

Scripture says the Lord appeared to Abraham here.

And indeed, the three men who appeared

had a special air about them.

Something important was happening.

Abraham showed not just the usual hospitality that a desert nomad

would show the stranger.

He sensed he had guests of great distinction.

He went all out.

It was the finest flour for the bread.

Despite having many many servants, he had Sarah herself make it.

He went out to the herd himself.

He made the choice of a tender calf.

There were curds and milk.

He served the food himself.

If you are a fan of Downton Abbey,

you know that Lord Grantham

would not be getting up from the table

to serve his guests.

That job belongs

to Mr. Carson the butler and the footmen.

But on this occasion

Abraham put the very best before these men.

and he himself served it.

Something was up.

Scripture says that the Lord appeared to Abraham here.

With all of this sense of occasion,

with the sense of importance being attached to these visitors,  
on the one hand,  
Sarah's laughter could seem impertinent and ill-mannered.

But on the other.

You can't really blame her.

These distinguished individuals,

who had Abraham and Sarah coming up with the best meal  
they could provide, made and served by their own hands,

these distinguished individuals,

who have been named as God himself with two angels,

or Jesus and two angels

these three had a question for Abraham

who was standing nearby while they ate.

They had a purpose for their visit.

It was time.

Sarah was eavesdropping from inside the tent.

‘Where is your wife Sarah?’ they asked.

‘There, in the tent.’ Abraham said.

Then one of the three said,

‘I will surely return to you in about this time next year,  
and Sarah your wife will have a son.’

It had been promised.

Now it was time.

Sarah was listening.

She heard this.

Abraham was 99, she was 90.

You can’t blame her for laughing to herself as she thought,

“After I am worn out, and my lord is old,  
will I now have this pleasure?”

You can’t blame her for laughing.

For the laughter is not just because of her age.

It is also the sceptical laughter of disappointment.

It is the laughter that comes after

‘Mom, I will clean my room right after I get to the next level.’

It is the laughter that comes after

‘Tomorrow I’m going to start that diet.’

It is the laughter that comes after

‘This election will bring change.’

It is the laughter of ‘I’ve heard it all before.’

It is the laughter of ‘Nothing is ever going to change.’

It is the laughter of ‘yeah right.’

You can’t blame Sarah for laughing.

She’s heard this before, that she was going to have a son.

Abraham had heard from God already.

A covenant had been made.

Abraham was going to be made into a great nation.

They first heard it 24 years before today’s Scripture story.

Twenty four years.

What’s the longest you’ve ever waited for something?

What were you doing 24 years ago?

How much has happened since then?

If the promise God made had been fulfilled in a timely manner,  
given the young age that women typically had children back then,  
twenty four years in, Sarah should have already been a grandmother.

You can't blame her for laughing.

Ninety. With a husband at 99.

How much longer can you hold out at 99?

I never had a true sense of how many years 99 really is,

until I had this one pastoral visit,

when I was serving in Collingwood.

I was fresh out of school.

I had gone to a nursing home to visit a woman who was nearing 100.

While frail physically, she was still very sharp-minded.

We had good conversation.

She shared with me that she was worried about her daughter.

She was worried that her daughter was no longer going to be able

to come up to Collingwood and visit her.

I asked what it was that would stop her daughter from coming.

The daughter was going to have to do her driver's test.

Mom was worried that she wasn't going to pass.

Her daughter was turning 80.

The daughter was 80.

What would her daughter do if she couldn't drive?

To which she said,

'Well, I suppose if my granddaughter got finished work earlier she could drive her mother up to see me.'

'I said, oh, like take an afternoon off?'

She said, no, 'early retirement.'

I asked, 'How old is your granddaughter?'

I was told, 'She'll be 60 this year.'

I asked, Do you have great-grandchildren?

Oh yes, the oldest of them is 40.

Great, great grandchildren?

Oh yes, the first one is off to university.

At that point in my life,

I was closest in age to of all people,

her great, great grandchild.

And there I was in my mid-twenties with a child of my own.

It blew my mind.

All to say 90 is a significant age.

It was when Sarah was 90 years old,

the Lord appeared with the angels,

‘This time next year.’

Sarah laughed.

I’m too old for this.

It was all the way back, decades before, in chapter 12

that God first told her husband Abraham

that he would make Abraham

into a great nation,

and to set out for the land of Canaan.

This promise from God was a huge deal,

for Abraham and his wife Sarah didn’t have any children.

Abraham was 75 then.

It certainly didn’t seem like an ideal time,



to be starting out all over again on a new adventure.

We like to think about coasting in to the finish line,

not heading back to the starting line.

Sarah's willingness to go with Abraham,

to pull up roots,

and start all over again in a new land is a huge act of faith

and courage.

Anyone who has immigrated knows what a big deal

this is,

and what an even bigger deal it is

to do it at 75.

We would do well to model Abraham and Sarah's faith and obedience.

That's what many sermons would say,

and they would be right in saying so.

But twenty four years is a long time.

A snort of a laugh and saying I'm too old for this makes perfect sense.

Abraham and his family made it to Canaan.

Then they had to move to Egypt.

Then they moved through the Negev desert.

Then they moved back to the plain of Jordan.

It was there years later, on the plain of the Jordan

God made his promise to Abraham, again.

I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth.

It had been years and years of moving.

Abraham was now in his 80's.

How would God's promise sound this time?

'Umm, sure, okay, thanks God.

While thinking. I still don't have a child.

God's going to have to get moving.'

There were more years.

How long Lord?

It's a plea you hear repeatedly in the Psalms.

Twenty four years Lord?

That's laughable. I'm too old for this.

There was a moment where Abraham called God out.

Many, many years after hearing the initial promise, he said to God.

‘Sovereign Lord, what can you give me,

since I remain childless?

Eliezer of Damascus

is going to inherit everything.

You have given me no children.

So a servant in my household will be my heir.’

This is the Bible passage we don’t often get to hear.

But it is the part I’m interested in.

When faith starts to get tired.

When you start to think,

‘maybe I’m too old for this’

When faith starts to feel laughable.

That’s the part I need to hear about.

Maybe you do too.

God said to Abraham,

“Eliezer will not be your heir,

but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.”

God took Abraham outside and said,

“Look up at the sky and count the stars—

if indeed you can count them.”

Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

It is said that Abraham believed God

and it was credited to him as righteousness.

Many sermons have been written about the righteousness

that comes from believing God.

Even the apostles Paul and James wrote about it

in their letters to the early church.

Abraham believed, trusted,

and it was credited to him as righteousness.

He rightly deserves the credit.

It had been a lot of years already,

and God kept saying he was going to come through.

Again, maybe it's the dark side of my personality,

but I take a greater interest in what continues to happen

to Abraham as he waits on God's promise.

For it is in the very next chapter,

right after God took Abraham out to look at the stars,  
that Abraham and Sarah's faith faltered again.

Sarah still had not borne any children.

She had an Egyptian slave named Hagar.

Anxious about the future, Sarah said to Abraham,

'The Lord has kept me from having children.

Go sleep with my slave and perhaps I can build a family through her.'

Abraham agreed.

So the two of them took matters into their own hands.

Sarah got tired of waiting for God.

She started taking charge of her own plans,

charting their own future,

blazing their own path.

Which isn't necessarily a bad thing in and of itself,

except when God  
has already given you a heads up on his plans for you  
and you've made a covenant with God,  
and said yes, I'm in God, I'm going to trust you,  
and then you don't.

But honestly,

how long does one have to wait?

This had all started when Abraham was 75.

Hagar had a son.

Abraham named him Ishmael 'God hears.'

There is a certain irony in the name.

Abraham took matters into his own hands.

Then he declared. God hears.

Abraham was 86 when Ishmael was born.

It was eleven years since God first promised Abraham descendants.

Then today we read,

Abraham was 99 years old. Sarah 90.

Ishmael was 13 now. Think Bar mitzvah. He was a man.  
It was 24 years since Abraham was told by God to move.  
24 years.

It's laughable.

While there are sermon writers who will talk about

Abraham and Sarah's willingness to uproot and obey God,

and there are sermon writers who will point to Abraham

believing God and it being credited to him as righteousness,

I'm the guy who says,

look at that,

a person who couldn't wait for God

and God's timing,

a person who took matters into her own hands

a person who tried to force God's hand,

a person who got tired of waiting on God's promise,

a person who grew frustrated that God

wasn't moving fast enough.

A person who thought it was laughable.

Who thought she was too old for this.

A person like me.

A person like you.

Sarah tried to deny that she laughed.

She lied to the angel.

I didn't laugh.

We lie too, we say, oh no, I'm trusting God.

But the angel can hear our snort, 'Yes, yes you did laugh.'

Sarah, did indeed have a son.

It was time.

It was in God's time.

The text tells us, as God said,

and as God promised

and at the very time God promised.

They named the boy Isaac.

He laughs.

In case you are wondering,

the name isn't a reference to the baby.



There is an old cliché out there.

“If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans.”

God says in Scripture,

“I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you

and not to harm you,

plans to give you a hope and a future.”

The child’s name was ‘He laughs.’

In time.

In God’s time.

Biding your time,

Waiting,

waiting for God to work,

waiting for God to move,

waiting for God to provide, to heal, to restore,

waiting for God to lead,

waiting for God to answer.

waiting for God,

well, it is easy to think,

I don't have time for this.

I can't wait on God for this.

It is easy to grow weary in the waiting.

It is easy to grow tired of holding your faith.

It is easy to think, I'm too old for this.

It's easy to think, this is laughable.

But in this account of Sarah, we learn in God's time,

God will.

God does.

God is trustworthy.

There was an occasion, Jesus waited.

He was told that his good friend Lazarus was very sick.

Mary and Martha, his sisters, Jesus close friends sent word.

Come quickly Jesus.

Heal him.

Jesus waited.

Jesus took his time.

On his own timeline, with a greater purpose in mind,

he waited and stayed where he was.

Lazarus died.

When Jesus finally made his way to the house of his friends.

They were so upset.

Jesus, if you had been here my brother would not have died.

If you had only been here.

Why did you wait?

What took so long?

Trusting you is laughable.

Jesus went to Lazarus' tomb.

He ordered the stone that covered it taken away.

He called for Lazarus to come out.

Lazarus emerged, covered in his grave clothes.

Jesus said I will.

I will restore.

I will heal.

I will bring life.

I will.

You may think

you're too old for this,

that you are out of time,

that it's too late,

that God has ignored or worse, abandoned you.

You may have grown tired with the waiting.

When the angel heard Sarah laugh, he asked,

“Is anything too hard for the Lord?”

But listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah today.

They are the words for those weak with waiting.

Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God,

the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary,

and his understanding no one can fathom.

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;

but those who hope in the Lord

will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;

they will run and not grow weary,

they will walk and not be faint.

Even if it takes twenty four years and a miracle.

Even if it takes a lifetime.

It will be tempting to put God aside.

To take things into your own hands.

To make your own future.

But even the young grow tired and weary.

It is those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength.

Sarah had a son, and heirs like sand on the shore.

Lazarus emerged from the tomb.

God will.

Whatever God's purposes are for you, lean into your trust of God.

Stick with God.

For God will.

Wait on the Lord.

For waiting on the Lord will never get old.

And the God who delights and takes joy

in you and his creation

the God who has plans for you,

will always enjoy the last laugh.

Meet the promise.

A boy named Isaac.

He laughs.

Amen.