

Gen..: Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?"
Ps.: O LORD, I am your servant; I am your servant, the child of your serving girl. You have loosed my bonds.
Rom: hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.
Matt: When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Is Anything Too Wonderful for the Lord?

It seems especially fitting, in that unplanned things-just-work-out kind of way, that we read the story of Abraham the father of our faith.

But perhaps also especially fitting is Sarah's part in all of this....

This is not the first time God has made this same promise...nor does this singular moment tell the whole story...

Which any father worthy of the title will tell you....

What goes into fatherhood, into husbandhood, into parenthood, is a complex, winding story, to be sure, and at the heart of it are the Sarahs who work-work-work with our Abrahams to shape our lives and our future.....

That is the thing...The beginning of the story...the story of our first ancestors—Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rachel, Jacob and Rebekah, and then Joseph and his brothers...

In our beginning stories, our ancestors are anxious about their future, whether they will have one, before they have their own place, while they are living in tents, vulnerable aliens in a foreign land.

Anxiety over the future is the story of Abraham and Sarah's childlessness...

How can they claim faith in their God if the story stops with them, their accumulation of wealth without any legacy, none at all?

Faith without fulfillment of promise.

Not surprisingly, Sarah bears the burden of this...**SHE** is barren...the future depends upon **her**...a heavy burden to bear, especially given how much of a dreamer Abraham is, looking at the stars and believing that he will have more offspring than the stars in the sky...

Which, last time I checked, he cannot do alone...No... fathering is not something we do alone, no, not alone....

When the three travelers arrive, Abraham scurries about, going to his long-suffering wife to give her orders to cook up a big meal, which she does, and then he sits by his guests in the shade of the Oak trees, while Sarah, as if she were an obedient Southern Baptist woman, hides nearby in a tent listening to the men talking....

And then something happens again...yet again...A child is promised....again...

And she laughs...

Erupts into laughter? Bursts into laughter? Guffaws? Howls?

It is not a snicker, not a titer, but a laugh loud enough for the men to hear

The response of the three men is what we remember—they say...Is there anything too wonderful for the Lord?

Which she takes as an accusation....

Responds as if she is guilty, denying she laughed, which is absurd—they all heard it...

Maybe it is something like getting the last laugh, you know, maybe she is laughing at them, at Abraham, at all this nonsense about HER having a child....

Hah...as if...

Maybe her laughter tells the truth of how she feels about all of this, about what she has sacrifice and lost believing she has a future, will have a child, that Abraham is capable of fathering a child **with her**...

Can we blame her?

The **first** time this promise was made long before this,

When she and Abram were already too old for children, to have a future,

The promise made to Abraham—look at the stars and count them, if you can count them, so will your dependents be...as if he can do it alone...but she believed and she tried, they tried and failed, for years they tried and failed, until at last she is filled with despair and self-loathing,

So, God bless her...She blames God.

She says that God has prevented her from having a child...

And so she takes matters into her own hands, makes her own plan, since God has failed her...desperate to create a legacy and a future, she "**gives**" an Egyptian slave, a girl named Hagar, to Abraham to have a child with, something like surrogacy I suppose, and Abraham...complies?

We have no way of understanding how these kinds of arrangements worked in the ancient world (people who talk about traditional marriage certainly don't cite Abraham and Sarah and Hagar as examples) It looks to me like Abraham missed an opportunity here,

...should have said to Sarah: “No my love, no: we can trust the promises of God us, you are part of that promise; we will have a child together, as God has promised us together, you and me together, as God said, as many as the stars in the heavens, remember?”

Alas, when Hagar becomes pregnant, Sarah is angry. Hagar’s pregnancy proving Sarah not Abraham is the “problem,”

In her distress, she takes out her own sense of shame on poor Hagar, who has no choice in the matter, none at all....And still long before the laugh, years before the laugh, after Hagar has given birth to Ishmael, when she and Abram are yet older, God comes to make a promise yet again, this time giving a sign of the covenant with Abraham and Sarah, giving them their new names....

Through all of this time passes, and she and Abraham get older, and in all the promises there is nothing but promises, empty promises, barren promises.

And all of this shame and contempt and frustration and emptiness is contained in Sarah’s laugh....somehow...

Hah!

Because it is absurd to believe it?To protect herself from believing it?
Because she has suffered so much already, her trust has been broken. It is not just that it is too late but that she can’t keep pretending anymore, is not going to play along with this nonsense anymore?

Hah!

God bless all our Sarahs and all they has given, have suffered, for the ways they have carried the burden of the promise...

The ways in good faith they have tried and tried and continued to believe and maintained faith in the promise of God through all the hardships they have endured,

Yes, of course, we know how the story will end.

We are here on this lovely Sunday, we ourselves are offspring of Abraham and Sarah, our first ancestors, we are the countless stars of God's first promise to Abraham, and we are Sarah's laughter.....

Is there anything too wonderful for God? No, of course, no, there is nothing to wonderful

But there is much that is too wonderful for us, because like Sarah we have endured much, suffered much, believed and given and blamed ourselves when things don't go as planned, as we pray they will go,

When God's timing is too long and violates our own sense of timing, when we feel too old and too used up look for for some young Hagar to force into labor...You do the work if you think you can do it better...I am done and my future is behind me...I have given all I have to give and and used up and played out—nothing new will happen. I am barren of hope and have lost all faith that anything new and good will be borne of me.

The anxieties we suffer as modern believers about our own future, the future of our families, the future of our church, the future of our nation and our national politics, of what it means for us to believe in the promises of God in Christ new life will emerge, children of God, disciples of Christ...these anxieties are not new, not new all all,

This is how the story begins, our Genesis story, and for us as for our first ancestors.

Is anything too wonderful for God...

Still later, long after Sarah's laugh, Isaac is born...

His name a play on words, translate to HE WILL LAUGH.

A testament to what she suffered through to give birth to the future,

Her bitter laughter transferred into joyful laughter, a future, a legacy..

Is there anything too wonderful for our God?

A Reading from the Book of Genesis

The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground.

He said, 'My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.'

So they said, 'Do as you have said.' And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, 'Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.'

Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

They said to him, 'Where is your wife Sarah?' And he said, 'There, in the tent.' Then one said, 'I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.'

And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.

So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?'

The Lord said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh, and say, “Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?” Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.’

But Sarah denied, saying, ‘I did not laugh’; for she was afraid.

He said, ‘Oh yes, you did laugh.’

The Lord dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised.

Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him.

And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.

Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Now Sarah said, ‘God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.’

And she said, ‘Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.’