

June 18, 2023

Genesis 18:1-15

<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>He said, “My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. <sup>4</sup>Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. <sup>5</sup>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.” <sup>6</sup>And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, “Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.” <sup>7</sup>Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. <sup>8</sup>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.

<sup>9</sup>They said to him, “Where is your wife Sarah?” And he said, “There, in the tent.” <sup>10</sup>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.

<sup>11</sup>Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. <sup>12</sup>So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?” <sup>13</sup>The Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ <sup>14</sup>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.” <sup>15</sup>But Sarah denied, saying, “I did not laugh”; for she was afraid. He said, “Oh yes, you did laugh.”

Two messages: Abraham and Sarah and the Southern New England Conference’s Annual Meeting in Worcester.

The Abraham and Sarah story offers many possibilities

- hospitality
- sharing of food
- Sarah’s laugh

Sarah’s cynical laughter spoke to me

Describe her situation

- number one wife, but no son, no heir
- anxious, and now a little bitter
- Hagar, with son, Ishmael, does not help
- probably given up on prayer

Haven’t we all been there?

Some dark place, praying desperately, finding no answer?

Bible stories make it seem so easy.

Sarah had a son; the impossible now possible

But, even for Sarah, there were decades of waiting, unbelieving, anger, despair

All through the Bible we are told – “wait patiently for the Lord”

Much easier said, than done

Still, even though I struggle, I continue on in prayer

But, not just praying and waiting; not just passive. Sarah and Abraham were active participants in the conception of their child, Isaac. We, too, have to act on God’s promises, even if we feel helpless, even if it seems hopeless, we are called to trust and act.

Which leads me to the second message

Explain formation of new conference out of three and Edgewood's relationship to Conference and Denomination

Larger conference can have stronger voice in public sphere

With this new beginning the Conference leadership stated what would guide us moving forward:

**Purpose Statement:** Love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and love our neighbor as ourselves

**Vision Statement:** United in Christ's love, a just world for all

**Mission Statement:** United in Spirit and inspired by God's grace, we welcome all, love all, and seek justice for all.

**3 Great Loves** campaign: Love of Children, Love of Neighbor, Love of Creation

Four years on SNEUCC "declare these values essential to our shared ministry together:"

- "local church exists to make disciples of Jesus and welcome all people unconditionally to share in this calling"
- committed to loving children, neighbor, and creation by "seeking racial, economic, environmental and LGBTQ justice"
- "encourage adaptive and transformational leadership"
- "form covenant partnerships with all who work for the common good"

Two Sermons find common ground:

We fear Edgewood Church is declining, like Sarah, we are anxious, perhaps a little cynical about our future

- must wait, pray, and listen

- but we must also continue to act – continuing to live "the love and justice of Jesus" by finding ways to love children, love our neighbor, and love creation
- and, to do so cooperatively– looking for partners in the community around us

Sarah laughed cynically at the unbelievable statement of the Lord. We, too, are possibly uncertain, if not cynical, about the future of our congregation and building, which we love.

As hard as it is sometimes I pray you, we will continue to step out in faith, seeking to be true disciples of Jesus and helping others grow into discipleship. For I am convinced that we are just what the larger Edgewood community, Cranston, and the world vitally need.

May God bless our living into the love and justice of Jesus. Amen.