

Sarah: The Woman Who Dared to Laugh

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A Son Promised to Abraham and Sarah

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

⁹ They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" ¹³ The Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' ¹⁴ 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." ¹⁵ But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. He said, "Oh yes, you did laugh."

A couple of years back at Gethsemane Lutheran the kids did an Advent Program titled "God Keeps God's Promises". We had kids from age one to fifteen, English-speaking, non-speaking, French-speaking, kids who could read, and kids who could not and at least three adults other than myself up on stage too. After each scene the kids would all shout together "GOD KEEPS GOD'S PROMISES!!!" One of the scenes the kids enjoyed discussing while learning their parts for the program was the story of Sarah and Abraham.

Sarah laughed; we are told that she laughed. We are then told that she denies laughing because she's afraid, but God heard her laugh either way. Sarah hears the news of her impending pregnancy by eavesdropping on her husband's conversation. 'They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?"' (Genesis 18:9) Three men return to Abraham by the Oaks of Mamre, Abraham invites them to eat and as they do they ask where Sarah is. The Lord is satisfied with Abraham's answer which begs the question; Why?

Many would argue that you shouldn't ask why God does anything. My mom would argue that I've never backed down from asking a why question in my life.

We know she laughed though! It says she "laughed to herself" about getting pregnant when she was ninety years old. Sarah was done with menopause, she and Abraham probably had separate sleeping bags if they didn't have whole separate tents, and she had just asked Abraham to have a baby with her handmaiden, there was a lot to think about in that sentence. Sarah's reaction is more than an emotional knee jerk reaction to sudden life altering news.

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Sarah was also devoted to God. Sarah believed God would keep His promises, she believed that Abraham (Abram) was to be made into a great nation- and was committed to making that happen and had accepted her barren fate. She had probably not yet seen these strangers she had cooked for; she was certainly not supposed to speak to them unless addressed directly and participating in her husband's affairs was definitely off the table. In this exchange we see Sarah respond *for* Abraham saying "I did not laugh" *for she was afraid*. There was no arguing with a man, but there was *no disputing God*. She would continue to be the proud, determined, and strong woman she had been those ninety years though.

Ultimately, God knows. I tell the Sunday school kids all the time that even if they don't say it...God knows. They don't have to say their prayers out loud...God knows. We don't have to say mean things out loud...God knows. We don't have to share when we are scared to walk into the school building, or when we are afraid the other kids won't like us, or when we're sad or anxious or angry: we can say those prayers in our heads because God hears us, and he knows! God heard Sarah laugh whether she laughed out loud or in her head. God heard her insecurities, her disbelief at news of a pregnancy in her late life, it didn't matter if those insecurities were kept bottled up or not. Her laugh was not a joking laugh, not a 'ha-ha' or a joyous laugh, but one of incredulity.

Even still, God keeps God's promises! Sarah's son is named Isaac which means "laughter", and with his birth Sarah becomes the mother of many nations.

Incredulous laughter seems a common theme anymore. If we turn on the news, our computers, our social media, or check our emails almost every day it feels like there is something that causes a spell of incredulous laughter. I wonder what Sarah would laugh at today, and how different her laughter would be. Would it still be incredulous laughter, or would it be joyous laughter at how wonderful and different her nations have become?

I wonder how we would react if we were to eavesdrop on a conversation God was having about what was to come for us. Or if God were to tell us what blessing are in store for our congregations, our nations, our world in 100 years I bet we couldn't help but laugh. How different each of these places will look a century from now – how different these places look than they did 100 years ago. Incredulous laughter; a bristle in the face of discomfort and change.

Sarah named Isaac for laughter and said God brought her laughter, and anyone who heard would laugh with her. We continue to laugh with Sarah, incredulously. We continue to push limits on where and how established positions of power lie and what our churches look like as Sarai showed us could be done by eavesdropping on conversations and maintaining equal power in her marriage.

'Women belong in all places where decisions are being made. It shouldn't be that women are the exception.' Ruth Bader Ginsburg

Keep laughing, Gethsemane. Joyously, incredulously, out loud or in your head. Laughter is good medicine, and God hears it and He knows. Only He knows the blessings that laughter will bring in 100 years, 1,000 years and more; but all we can do is laugh with Sarah.