

Sermon

Faith, Hope, and the God of Miracles

A Sermon for Cary Presbyterian Church

Sunday, June 18, 2023

All Saints

Gen. 18:1 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."

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Gen. 21:1 The LORD dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had promised. 2 Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. 3 Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. 4 And Abraham circumcised his

son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5 Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. 6 Now Sarah said, “God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.” 7 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.”

Rom. 4:13 For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. 14 If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. 15 For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

16 For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, 17 as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”) —in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. 18 Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “So numerous shall your descendants be.” 19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. 20 No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, 21 being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. 22 Therefore his faith “was reckoned to him as righteousness.” 23 Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone, 24 but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

I. I am not much of a Waiter . . .

A. Perhaps I got this from father — “do something if it’s wrong!”

- B. Nagging anxiety that I have not done enough yet . . .**
- C. Sometimes frenetic activity has been a way to avoid difficult introspection . . .**

II. There is an art to knowing when to wait and when to act.

- A. Business**
- B. With Family**
- C. So too with Discernment of God’s will and work**
 - 1. Often the Sunday message is a call to “action”**
Last week Abram & Sari were told to “Go!”
 - 2. Today we will explore the call to “wait.”**
The angels tell them, wait and a child will be born — a message so preposterous that *both* Abram and Sarai giggle.
Indeed, Abram does more than giggle. In **chapter 17:17** we are told that his reaction is:

Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, “Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?”

- D. God’s good news is often so preposterous that it is only by faith and with hope that we could ever believe it.**
- E. [Faith is] “ . . . a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely-given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.” — John Calvin**

III. When we have *faith* . . .

- A. It allows us to begin living in *hope*...
- B. Expectant -
 Waiting for God to reveal the thing which is happening in us as we wait.
 Not unlike an expectant mother who waits knowing that something new is about to be born.
- B. Open to Hope — trusting that God’s love is enough.
 - 1. Open ended waiting is *hard* but points to *Hope*.
 - a. Trust leads to Hope vrs. Fear which leads to premature asking/speaking.
Hope is to trust that God is going to make good on promises but we are not in control of pace or particulars.

IV. Hope -

- A. Hope — “Lord God, you have made us for yourself and our hearts remain restless until they find their rest in you.” [Augustine, Confessions I.1]
- B. Hope is the virtue of yearning for and trusting in our union with God. This virtue is made all the more essential in the face of human sin which threatens to undo us and which might lead us to despair of ever reaching the goal of union with God.
- C. This virtue knows that we are invited into union with God and it also knows that such union right now is far from complete.

D. Hope — is the virtue for those who are *status viatoris* or “on the way.” — Like our pilgrims walking the Camino today!

1. Two things follow:

a) We have the sense that we are going somewhere .

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b) We know that we have not yet arrived.

E. Philippians 3:10

F. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, 11 if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

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V. Paul turns to the *God of miracle* when describing faith and hope to the Romans.

A. He turns to the God who makes things to happen *which are not on anyone’s radar.*

B. Paul speaks of the God who brings little babies to old & barren people.

C. Angels in Genesis 18:14 “Is anything too wonderful for God?”

D. It may be that you and I struggle to believe that God cares and that God will act to make our lives full of meaning and blessing — but the question which rings down through the ages to us asks, “Is anything too wonderful for God?”

- 1. Do we trust that God can provide us a future that we cannot manufacture for ourselves?**

XI. A faithful life is thus identified as a life where we receive gifts from God which we cannot anticipate.

- A. A life in which we learn the hard work of waiting in hope. Whenever I think of this hopeful waiting I am reminded of a letter written by Vincent Van Gogh to his brother.**

“There may be a great fire in our soul, yet no one ever comes to warm himself at it, and the passersby only see a wisp of smoke coming through the chimney, and go along their way. Look here, now what must be done? One must tend the inner fire, have salt in oneself, wait patiently yet with how much impatience for the hour when someone will come and sit down — maybe to stay? Let him who believes in God wait for the hour that will come sooner or later.”

- B. If your life is anything like mine - or like Abram and Sarai’s for that matter - then you have unfinished business — places of healing which are yearned for and, as yet, unrealized.**
- C. It is precisely in that kind of life where faith and hope can help.**
 - 1. Trusting the God is, indeed, “benevolently inclined” toward us and that “with God nothing is impossible.”**
 - 2. Letting Hope teach to live *expectantly* knowing that God is at work even when we cannot clearly see that.**
- D. I hope that we will all trust above all else that God is with us now and always to bring about the miracles we cannot yet see.**