

SUPERHEROES OF FAITH - ABRAHAM

Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

Laughing at God's Promises

Genesis 17:15-22

God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. ¹⁶ I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her." ¹⁷ Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" ¹⁸ And Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!" ¹⁹ Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. ²⁰ And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. ²¹ But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year." ²² When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God went up from him.

Every superhero needs a villain. And every villain needs an evil laugh. Maybe it's not a necessity, but an evil laugh sure is a bonus when it comes to being a great villain. You know the routine. The villain unveils his evil plot to take over the world and then lets loose a great, "Muahahahaha...." Not all laughter is evil, however. Most often, we think of laughter as a good thing. It has been called medicine for the soul. This morning we are going to look at both sides of laughter in the light of our faith life. Our guide for this journey is the man that we find laughing in our reading today, our hero of faith: Abraham. With Abraham as inspiration, we learn that it can be a good thing to laugh at God's promises.

In order to really appreciate the situation we find in our reading this morning, we really need to retrace Abraham's steps up to this point. Abraham (who was known as Abram at the time) had a life changing experience at the age of 75. He was living in a place called Haran. He had moved there with his father Terah on their way to the land of Canaan. But his father never made it to Canaan. God had chosen Abraham as the one who would make that journey to Canaan. In Haran, God appeared to Abraham and told him that it was time to go. He needed to pack up his family, leave behind his homeland, and head out to a place where God would lead him. This required a great leap of faith. But it was not a blind leap of faith. Together with the command to head out, God gave Abraham some amazing promises. God told Abraham that he would go with him on his journey. God told Abraham he would be on his side, blessing those who blessed him and cursing those who cursed him. God told Abraham he would make his name great and make him a blessing. And then God gave Abraham the most wonderful promise of all. He told Abraham that through his seed, the whole world would be blessed. Abraham believed God's promises and he headed out.

Ten years later, it was clear that God had blessed Abraham like he said he would. Abraham was living in Canaan. He had accumulated much wealth and many possessions. But the part of God's

promise that he was still waiting for was a child through whom God would bless the whole world. And that promise was looking more and more unlikely with every passing day. Abraham was in his eighties. Sarah was in her seventies. It seemed they were beyond any hope of producing a child as God said would happen. And so Abraham and Sarah took matters into their own hands. They did what was customary at the time and Sarah gave her maidservant to Abraham so he could have a child with her. Their plan worked in that it resulted in a child being born—Ishmael. But their plan was a failure in the fact that it was not according to God's will.

After the birth of Ishmael, Abraham didn't hear anything from God for quite some time. It's certain that he was filled with conflicting emotions about the situation. Perhaps Ishmael was the heir that God had promised him. On the other hand, God might have abandoned him for his adulterous relationship with Sarah's servant, Hagar. For thirteen years, Abraham wondered and waited. Then God appeared and spoke to Abraham at the age of 99. That is where our reading picks up. God had not abandoned Abraham. He assured him that he was still going to fulfill all of his promises to him. But he would do it in his way. His way involved Abraham and Sarah having a child, even in their old age. He told Abraham, *"As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah.¹⁶ I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."* How do you think Abraham reacted to God's promise? God had just told him that he was going to have a son when he was 100 years old and his wife was 90! From our reading, we learn that Abraham's reaction was laughter. And that doesn't surprise us. We might have laughed as well. But what kind of laughter was it?

We might think that it was a laughter of disbelief. "I'm really going to be a father at my age? No way, God! Things like that just don't happen." We might think it was a laughter of doubt. "I know you are a great God and you can do great things, but I think this might be a bit too much." We might think that is the kind of laughter we have here because that is the way we sometimes treat God's amazing promises. God says things in his Word that are hard for our human reason to comprehend. God says things that seem very unlikely to come true. We look at our situation and everything tells us that it is impossible even when God tells us it is possible and we are tempted to doubt him and laugh the evil laugh of "I don't think you're going to carry though on this promise, God." It can happen when we experience hardship and we don't think that God can work things out for our good. It can happen when our resources are stretched too thin and we don't think that God can take care of our physical needs like he said he would. It can happen when we have really messed up and our sin is so great we aren't sure he can forgive this one, even though he said that the blood of Jesus purifies us from every sin. There are times in life when our faith is stretched to the breaking point by the reality of what we see around us and when we are tempted to throw in the towel on God and try to take things into our own hands.

But instead of laughing at how impossible our situation is and how hopeless it seems for us at times, God would have us laugh in a different way. Abraham's laughter was not a laughter of doubt or despair. Rather, Abraham laughed at how good God was and how amazing it was that God was about to make the impossible possible. We know this because we have some inspired commentary on the situation in the book of Romans. In that book, the Spirit tells us, *"Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead-- since he was about a hundred years old-- and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised."* Abraham did not laugh

out of unbelief, but rather he laughed out of faith knowing that he was about to see God do something extraordinary. God had carried through on his seemingly impossible promises to Abraham in the past, and he trusted that he would do the same in this situation.

We can have a similar confidence when we are faced with a situation in life that seems impossible. We simply need to remember who our God is. He is a God that loves to make the impossible possible. He did what was impossible when he took on human flesh and was born of the virgin Mary. He did what was impossible when he lived a life free from sin and suffered an innocent death for the sake of the world's sin. He did what was impossible when he burst from the tomb three days later and declared victory over sin, death and the devil. He did what was impossible when he washed you clean of sin through the water of Holy Baptism. The fact that you are here today in God's house, worshipping your Lord, would be an impossible feat were it not for the amazing grace of God that brought you to this point. And the God who has been with you to this very day will not leave you or forsake you no matter what the circumstance. You can rely on him. You can trust that his promises will hold true.

And so when you find yourself in that situation where you are really up against the wall and it seems there is no way out. It seems that God has let you down and abandoned you in your hour of need. What should you do? You should laugh. You should laugh not out of doubt or despair. You should laugh because you have such a good God that he is going to find a way for you even in the most difficult of times. You know this is true because you know that you have a God who can and will do everything he has promised you. Place your trust and your confidence in him. He will never let you down. **Amen.**

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