Sermon for Advent Midweek 1, December 5, 2018

Genesis 18:1-15; 21:1-7 (esp. 18:14)

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In the name of the Father and of the T Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. The Word of God which engages us this evening is based on Genesis 18: “[The Lord said:] ‘Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.’”

## The Lord’s shocking promises

Long ago, there was a pagan man who lived in a pagan country. He did not know the one true God, until all of a sudden he showed up one day. The Lord said to Abram:

“Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great… and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:1-3).

That’s quite a lot for this old, barren couple to take in. Abram was 75 years old at this point, and his wife Sarai was 65. They were unable to have kids—at least, they hadn’t thus far and “the way of women had ceased to be with [Sarai]” (Gen. 18:11). What the Lord was promising was outrageous. Could it be that Abram would finally have his heart’s desire—and then some?! So Abram went as the Lord told him. He left everything behind and followed the Lord’s promise.

## The Lord waits

Time passed. 24 years passed! The Lord showed up from time to time, but still there was no son. The Lord kept making this same promise over and over again, but still there was no son. The Lord fulfilled *other* parts of his promise: he brought Abraham to the Promised Land, and he blessed him immensely, and he was making his name great, but still Abraham had no son. Abraham wondered if the Lord had forgotten him or was unable or unwilling to help him.

Eventually, when the Lord promised him a son once more, Abraham “fell on his face and *laughed* and said to himself, ‘Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?’” (Gen. 17:17).

Later that same year the Lord came just once more to confirm the same promise. But this time God gave it a deadline. He said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son” (Gen. 18:10). Sarah overheard it, and *she laughed*. Hah! Yeah right! I’ve heard this one before, but I *still* haven’t seen any good come of it.

## Lol

For 24 years the Lord had been telling Abraham that he would give him a son and innumerable descendants. But 24 years is a long time to wait when you’re already 75! After a while, Abraham and Sarah just laughed at the ridiculousness of it. There’s no way! Surely God would’ve done it by now if he’s ever going to!

The Lord’s promises are *supposed t*o make us laugh, but not in this way. Faith responds to the Lord’s promises, not with a *skeptical* laugh, but with a *joyful* laugh which proceeds from a merry heart that rests secure. The Lord’s promises are a cause for celebration. They take away our fear of the grim-looking days to come, and they give us a light and cheerful spirit.

## Able and willing

When the Lord promises us something, he is fully able and willing to give it to us. Despite whatever massive obstacles are in the way. Despite the biology with which God had previously made Sarah barren. Despite the physics that says that water does not pile up and form a wall to give people a clear walkway across the Red Sea. Despite the logic that says, “I cannot see God, therefore he cannot exist.”

The Lord *made* biology. He made physics. He made logic. And he is perfectly able to work *through* them and *around* them. He made all the barriers that we now see, and he removes them at will. He is not impotent. He is not bound by the limits of human ingenuity or creativity. And he certainly does not need our permission or guidance to do what he’s going to do.

## Promise, fulfillment

The Lord keeps his Word. He commands creation. He makes no take-backs on the promises he gives to us. When we laugh in skepticism, the Lord destroys our unbelief by being true to his promises, time and time again. We think that what God has promised is impossible, but then the Lord goes and does it anyway. And, since we’re so prone to forget the Lord’s work, he keeps making promises to us and fulfilling them, over and over.

The Lord promised to give a Son to Eve, to Abraham, and to David, and that Son was born.

The Lord promised, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel.” Hah! Yeah right! But then God does it.

The Lord promised, “Mary, you shall conceive, not through Joseph your betrothed, but by the Holy Spirit.” Hah! Yeah right! But then God does it.

The Lord promised, “The Son of Man must die and rise, and in so doing he will take away all your sin.” Hah! Yeah right! But then he does it.

The Lord promised, “Even though I’m going away and things will get really bad, I will come back for you.” Hah! Yeah right! It’s been 2,000 years, Jesus. A hundred generations have come and gone. When are you gonna keep that promise? This same Son promised to Eve, Abraham, and David; this same Son born of the virgin Mary; this same Son of God will keep this promise, too. He always does.

## Joyful laughter

And so we laugh. Satan tries his hardest to destroy the Church, but Jesus promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Scientists worry that humans will soon destroy the planet, but Jesus promised that Christians will be alive when he returns. The postmoderns and secularists see no reason why the Church should still exist, but they just can’t stamp it out. We ourselves worry that we have strayed too far, that we have sinned too much, that God could never love us; but then Pastor stands up and wipes away every last one of our sins and fears and doubts.

Dear friends in Christ, rest secure. Be at peace. Laugh at the ridiculousness of your fears and doubts. If God has promised it, then he will do it. He is perfectly able and willing. It might seem like it’s taking forever, and maybe you’ll even die before you finally get it. But then you’ll just sit up and walk out of your grave, laughing at the death which once held you but now lies impotent. Amen.