

June 14 - Saturday

Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Now Sarah said, "God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me." 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."

Genesis 21: 5-7

A hundred year old Abraham, Sarah, a wife way beyond menopausal age and a new born baby of their own named Isaac – these are realities that baffle the mind and bring either cynical laughter or total disbelief. Have you ever wondered why Biblical stories are of the same substance? This is just the beginning of the series of narratives, as we are ushered into the pages of Biblical materials we will encounter the same stuff. There are two things that we learn from these accounts – God is powerful and God works through people.

There is no argument about God's power. For those who believe in God no explanation is needed. Biblical stories are just a glimpse of God's capability. God can do anything – the impossible and even those that are yet to be conceived of by our human minds. In awe and wonder we bow down and worship God who creates, redeems and sustains. But the other truth is more intriguing – God works through people like Abraham and Sarah. God can bypass humans and do what God wants to do. I think of the image of starting a car by not using the key but by connecting some wires at the bottom using a jumper to make the ignition works. But God made a more challenging choice – working through people who have the capacity to disobey and making a mess out of God's plan. It is easier to work with stones and mountains and rivers but working with people is quite different.

Yes, God makes funny choices, a 100-year old Abraham and Sarah whose womb had ceased to be productive for a long, long time. God uses ordinary people, people with no extra ordinary abilities nor skills, people who are even reluctant to believe, people who complain all the time and see the difficulties ahead rather than the

possibilities that awaits, people who are rich, people who are poor, people of all kinds – the bottom line is that God does not work as a lone ranger. God works with people. God works with people like you and me. St. Teresa of Avila speaks about our Christian faith in this way:

*Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
no feet but yours, no hands but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which
the compassion of Christ
is to look out on a hurting world.
Yours are the feet with which
he is to go about doing good.
Yours are the hands with which
he is to bless all now.*

Today we are humbled and honored by the truth that God works through us as God works with the likes of Abraham and Sarah.

Prayer

*What a joy and privilege to know
that you work through us O God
in spite and despite of we are. Amen.*



June 13 - Friday

The LORD dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had promised. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.

Genesis 21: 1-4

And it came to pass – this is the story line used in the books when telling a narrative whose details were foretold and then comes true in due time. This is what happened to Sarah, the idea of having a son, which she thought of as a laughing matter finally comes true. The writer of Genesis puts it this way; *The LORD dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had promised.* What was said came to pass. What was promised was fulfilled!

The most exciting thing that can happen in our lives is that moment when the Lord deals with us. There are many scenarios in life when we were not dealt with at the particular moment. How many times have you experienced when someone told to you, “*can you wait for a while, I’ll deal with your concern in a moment.*” So while waiting, we took time to read, solve puzzles, keep ourselves busy and at some point we may even forget our real business for the day when we were so engrossed with what we did in the meantime. But it did not take so long, when our names were called and our concerns were dealt with accordingly.

God deals with each of us as God dealt with Sarah. God’s word will come true to our lives. The prophet Isaiah once said about God word: “*so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*” (55:11) In the meantime, we find ourselves laughing or we keep ourselves busy or at times forget that God spoke to us at some point. But that moment of truth shall come when God deals with us and God fulfills the promise. It comes. It will come not on our schedule or on our own terms. It comes in God’s time. I think of that chorus that we sing in church – *In His Time* that appropriately captures the message of Sarah’s experience, and our experience too.

*In his time, in his time
He makes all things beautiful
in his time.
Lord please show me everyday
As You’re teaching me your way
That you do just what you say
in your time.*

This is God's word for us today – *The LORD dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had promised.* Changed Sarah's name with your name!

Prayer

*Yes, Lord you deal with us personally.
Make us ready when you call us by our name.
Amen.*



June 12 - Thursday

The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' 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." But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. He said, "Oh yes, you did laugh."

Genesis 18: 13-15

“Is there anything too wonderful for the Lord?” or “is there anything too hard for the Lord?” as other translation puts it. We had a neighbor who would not miss to play his vinyl 33 rpm records on his box-type stereo everyday. Those were the days when compact discs and MP3's were unheard of. We love it when he played songs by Sergio Mendez & the Brazil 77, The Carpenters, The Bee Gees and The Beatles. But at times he kept on playing the song “It's Impossible” by Perry Como. I don't know why he loved that song but I remember very well the first two lines – “It's impossible, tell the sun to leave the sky, it's just impossible. It's impossible, ask a baby not to cry, it's just impossible...” I remember this song when I am confronted with this challenge from our text today – Is there anything that is impossible for God to do?

When we were High School at Pilgrim Institute, a United Church of Christ-Related Institution in Cagayan de Oro, we had Convocations every Tuesdays and Thursdays. Our Religion Teachers have favorite hymns that we keep on singing again and again. I remember “*God Who Touches Earth With Beauty*,” “*I Would Be True*,” “*Heaven Came Down*” and “*Nothing is Impossible*” among others. I can still sing the chorus of the last hymn:

*“Nothing is impossible
when you put your trust in God;
Nothing is impossible
when you're trusting in His Word.
Hearken to the voice of God to thee:
"Is there anything too hard for Me?"
Then put your trust in God alone
and rest upon His Word –
For ev'rything, O ev'rything,
Yes, ev'rything is possible with God!*

It's a bit nostalgic to remember the past, but I come to realize that this was how my faith was shaped. Hymns whose words I just sang in passing and at times in haste in the days of old. But hymns I now recall with great delight as I grow older and realize that indeed the God I believe is larger than what I thought. J. B. Philips wrote a classic book, “*Your God is Too Small*.” Sarah laughed because at that moment her God was too small. This is the challenge of the day – to believe not just in a God who can do greater things but above all a God bigger than what we can conceive. Jesus said, “*The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.*” (Luke 18:27 NKJ) Examining the Biblical witness and looking back at our varied experiences in life, when the question is raised – “*Is there anything too wonderful for the Lord?*” or “*is there anything too hard for the Lord?*” now we can confidently say – nothing!

Prayer

*In you, everything is possible O God
There is nothing more that we can we say. Amen.*

June 11 - Wednesday

They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." 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. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?'"

Genesis 18: 9-12

A promise that provokes laughter – a son from a barren wife and an old husband, Sarah could not hold her amusement at the thought. At least Abraham had some idea about it when God spoke to him about making his descendants a great nation. There could be some possibilities; adoption, bearing a son from one of his slaves (a practice acceptable during those times), but with Sarah already barren, the writer described her condition – *“It had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women”* – that was indeed a proposition that sounds like a comedy in the making. There was a time when Sarah dreamt of holding a son or a daughter in her arms but that was long time ago. At that moment she should be holding supposedly a grandchild and not a child of her own. So the comment, *“Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?”*

But stories of faith are always extraordinary in nature. The whole Bible is sprinkled with narratives that demonstrate the possibilities that can happen when God makes it happen. Laugh if you will but when the promise comes true, our laughter is transformed into sense of awe and wonder. Abraham and Sarah did not ask for a baby, they themselves could not imagine this scenario given their situation. But God provided them opportunity beyond what their

minds can visualize. If there is a lesson we learn about God's act in the history of people or nation and even in the world itself – it is the truth that God works beyond what we can ever dream nor imagine. We can only go as far as where our minds and our experience go, God can go far beyond the human limitations that all of us are bounded.

“...In due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son” this statement makes her laugh. Think about the surprising moments that come to your life, when something happened beyond your wildest dreams. When God answered more than what you requested, moments when you laughed and then stunned when right before your eyes God's wonderful plan unfolds.

Prayer

*Excuse us O God when we laugh
because we cannot help ourselves
imagining the possibility of the impossible. Amen.*



June 10 - Tuesday

Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. 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." And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. 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.

Genesis 18:4-8

Several folks noted a very distinctive difference between services rendered by Asian-owned airlines and one based in America. They said Asian flight stewardesses are more courteous and besides the food is more delicious. A taste of Asian hospitality – this is what they got when Abraham entertained his guests. It was a standard practice for guests to wash their feet. We remember Jesus acting as the host in the Upper Room washing the feet of his disciples before the Last Supper. Of course, food – the fellowship in the table is natural for us. The writer of Genesis took the pain in giving us all the details – 3 measures of choice flour, tender and good calf, curds and milk, this was the best that can be offered given that situation. Then Abraham “*stood by them under the tree while they ate.*” The host’s utmost joy is to see to it that guests are fully satisfied and all other needs are provided just on time.

How do we entertain guests? I remember the days when I was in the elementary school, we know that some high ranking officials were about to visit our school because the classrooms and offices will be decorated and new curtains and plates will come out and food donations were encouraged and solicited. The burden falls on the ordinary classroom teachers on how to make the guests satisfied and comfortable. But what about unknown guests, people whom we do not know. This is where the test of our hospitality comes in. The details of entertaining unknown guests are indeed important and could not be summed up in just one sentence.

Memories of a frame in our dining area when I was a child came to mind. These are words of that red board and white print neatly displayed.

*Christ in the head of this table
The Unseen Guests at every meal
The Silent Listener in every conversation*

It was a reminder of the sacredness of the moment of a meal on the table because of Christ’s presence. What if Christ’s presence is veiled and he is present not as an unseen guest but a guest that really eats and drinks, like the guests of Abraham?

Prayer

*Teach us O God
not to discriminate in our service
to entertain any guests
as if we entertain you. Amen.*

June 9 - Monday

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. 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. He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant."

Genesis 18:1-4

It is projected that today New York and the surrounding areas will probably hit records high in temperature. The heat wave yesterday was terrible but today we were told to brace ourselves for a warmer and humid weather. We could just imagine how difficult it was to live in the wilderness and dessert-like terrain without the comfort and the luxury of modern conveniences such as air-conditioners. Our reading today gives us a foretaste of Abraham's day – "*he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day.*" It did not say how high the temperature was but probably that's the typical day in the oaks of Mamre, hot, humid and very uncomfortable to stay inside the tent. But something special happened that day, the Lord appeared to Abraham. The appearance of God is called epiphany. In the Bible it comes in many forms, this time in a form of three men. Out from nowhere they just appeared and when Abraham looked up he saw them standing nearby.

Living in those days where people fight over pasture lands and wells and other resources, any intruder into a territory has to be dealt with decisively. Abraham had his own servants and most probably had his own guards. The surprise appearance of three men was a bit scary. Can they be spies or emissaries from other tribes to check how strong Abraham's group was? Are they friends or enemies? You'll never know. But Abraham's reaction was different *"he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant."* We were not told how they looked like, are they different in height, in the color of their skins or do they look like the people living around the area?

Epiphany stories are always unexpected and surprising. Many times people are caught unaware that they were dealing with the divine. Abraham could have missed the opportunity just as any of us can miss God's epiphany. In the epistle to the Hebrews, the writer reminded believers, *"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it."* (Hebrews 13:2) If God appears with shining armor we will bow down without second thoughts but what if God appears as an illegal alien who needs help, a person who definitely is not within our "class status" and "out of range with our intellect and experience?" What if God appears as a gay or a lesbian? What if God appears as a Muslim or a Buddhist or even a person without faith and ask us a favor? We cannot limit God's possibilities but what is important is the moment of recognition when we are confronted by God's epiphany that can come in unforeseen times and in the most unexpected places._

Prayer

*O God, _make us always conscious of the truth that you can manifest to us in many ways.
Keep us awake and alert, all the time. Amen.*