

Genesis 18:11-15, 21:1-7.2023

Laugh with Me!  
WRCoB 9.17.23

You've heard the expression  
Laughter is the best medicine.

Well, that's actually a true statement.

Laughter triggers healthy physical and emotional  
Changes to the body.

It strengthens immune systems  
Boosts mood, diminishes pain  
And protects from damaging effects of stress.

Pretty cool, eh?

So, to protect us from Covid  
I suggest eating some dirt  
And laugh while you're doing it!

It is also true that crying is good for you.  
It releases oxytocin and endorphins

So, when we find ourselves in a bad way  
When we want to laugh to keep from crying  
Go ahead, you're doing a good thing

Our physical and emotional  
And I would say, our spiritual well-being  
Benefits from a good cry and a good laugh!

In our story today  
Abraham and Sarah laughed to keep from crying.

But I'm jumping ahead of myself.

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Laughter isn't mentioned much in the Bible  
Something like 40 times.

Compare it to joy  
Which is mentioned some 219 times.

And when laughter is mentioned  
It is not always a positive thing.

For instance, in Matthew 9, Jesus is called to the home  
Of a synagogue leader.

His daughter had died and he pleads with Jesus to come.

When Jesus gets to the home  
He tells the gathered crowd  
That the girl is not dead but sleeping.

Their response? They laughed.

It was not a joyful laugh either.  
It was cynical and mocking!!

But there's another kind of laughter found in Luke 6.

Jesus, in his Sermon on the Plain, proclaims it.

**Luke 6:21b Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.**

This is the laughter that is filled with a deep sense of joy  
Deriving from God's grace and goodness and justice.

In today's Scripture Lesson

We find different kinds of laughter

And we'll get to that, but first a little background.

We are in the Book of Genesis.

The word genesis means the origin of something.

In the first 11 chapters of the Book of Genesis

We learn what's known as prehistory

History without dates.

This prehistory comes down to us as oral history

Past down from many generations

Until it was finally written down

Some 3400 years ago.

In those first chapters we find

The origins of creation

The fall of humankind in Eden

The first murder

Noah and the flood

The tower of Babel.

History that is rich in meaning.

When we get to chapter 12

We read the genesis or origin of the tribe of Israel

Beginning with Abraham and Sarah.

They were called by God from their home in Ur

To settle in Canaan

It begins with a promise from God to them.

**Genesis 12:2 I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.**

Abraham was 75-years-old, Sarah 65-years-old  
When God called them to Canaan

They were without children.

To be a father of a great nation  
It helps to have children, right?

25 years later, they were still without children.

God reminds Abraham of those promises.

**Genesis 17:16 “I will bless her and also give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”**

Well, here is the occasion when Abraham  
Had to laugh to keep from crying.

**17 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?”**

Abraham laughed a laugh of bitter disappointment.

For whoever heard of such a thing??

Sometime later Abraham and Sarah  
Host three heavenly visitors.

Sarah is in her tent  
After preparing and serving her guests.

She overhears one of the heavenly guests share  
That in due time she would bear a son.

In due time!  
Wait a minute, she's 90-years-old!

Back bent over from years of hard labor  
No teeth, arthritic hands and bunions on her feet  
A wrinkly, old, worn-out body

Her husband, ten years older, not much better.

In due time???!

Sarah laughs.  
She laughs just to keep from crying.

God hears her laugh.

**Genesis 18:13 CEV “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Me give birth? At my age?’**

**Genesis 18:14 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.”**

And then we have perhaps the most interesting dialog  
In the Old Testament.

**Genesis 18:15 CEB Sarah lied and said, “I didn’t laugh,”  
because she was frightened. But he said, “No, you  
laughed.”**

The NRSV says Sarah denied laughing  
But the NIV and CEB both say she lied.

Here is God and Sarah going to it.

I didn't laugh!

No, you did laugh!

No, I didn't!

Yes, you did!

Didn't!

Did!

Me, Sarah, laugh?

Why would I laugh?

A 90-year-old woman having a baby?

Why is that funny?

Happens all the time, right?

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The Lord fulfilled his promise to Abraham and Sarah.

Sarah conceived and gave birth to a son.

And guess what they named him?

Laughter, in Hebrew, Isaac.

Why?

Because it was too wonderful to be true.

It was too wonderful, the only response was to laugh.

Sarah and Abraham with walkers in hand

Laughed all the way from the nursing home

To the labor and delivery unit of the hospital.

They laughed as they returned to the nursing home  
With their little laughter in tow

And the whole cafeteria of geriatrics rise up  
And they laugh with Sarah  
Laughed at the wondrous things God had done.

**Genesis 21:6 “God has brought laughter for me;  
everyone who hears will laugh with me.”**

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Laughter is part of your expression of joy.

The psalmist, in our Call to Worship  
Wrote that when the Lord restored Israel  
They were like those who dream.

Their mouths were filled with laughter  
Their tongues with shouts of joy.

Why?

Because the Lord had done great things for them  
And they rejoiced.

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I have been accused of being too light-hearted  
Laughing and carrying on in the pulpit.

That I don't take things serious enough.

God created us with a sense of humor.

We are designed to laugh.

I also believe since we are made in the image of God  
God has a sense of humor too.

I mean look at the aardvark  
Or the warthog  
Or the marabou stork  
Or the duck-billed platypus

You got to have a sense of humor for that kind of creativity

And think about this.

Who would ever have guessed  
God would choose the nation of Israel  
The descendants of Abraham and Sarah  
To be God's chosen people?

You have to laugh knowing God  
Picked a 100-year-old man and a 90-year-old woman  
To bear a child named "laughter"

You need to laugh with joy knowing  
God chose the Savior of the world  
To be born in a stable  
Surrounded by donkeys and shepherds

The world may laugh at us for believing such nonsense

They laughed at the early apostles

**Acts 17:32 NLT When they heard Paul speak about the resurrection of the dead, some laughed in contempt, but others said, "We want to hear more about this later."**

Who gets the last laugh?

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Laughing is good for the soul.



And in the face of such brokenness  
Such sadness  
Such despair

We who have hope in Christ  
For his love and his redeeming graces  
For the coming of his kingdom

We have reasons to laugh with joyful hearts.

**Proverbs 17:22 A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones.**

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A man walked into our office last week.

He walked up to our Admin Assistant, Barbara  
And in a loud voice demanded

"Take me to see the head hog."

Barbara replied indignantly

"Sir, I'll thank you not to refer to our pastor that way.

Around here, we address our pastor with respect."

The man replied

"I've come to donate 5 million dollars to WRCOB".

"Excuse me sir", the Barbara replied

"Let me see if I can find the big fat pig for you."

~~

Let's laugh with Sarah

At the wondrous things God has done

Sarah and Abraham would not find things easy

There were still plenty of hardships ahead.

But at that moment

When they reentered the nursing home  
Pushing that baby carriage

And seeing all their friends and loved ones

What was there to do but laugh?

And all their friends, the nurses and staff

All they could do was laugh along with them.

Because never in anyone's wildest dreams

Could they ever have imagined

What God would do.

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And so, sisters and brothers

Whenever you are faced

With seemingly insurmountable obstacles

Instead of despairing, take courage

God's got this.

Laugh, yes, sometimes you have to laugh

Just to keep from crying.

Fill your mouths with laughter

And your tongues with shouts of Joy.

Our God has done and will continue to do

Great things for us.

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.