

**Sunday 14th June 2020**

**Reading: Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7**

**18** The LORD appeared to Abraham at the sacred trees of Mamre. As Abraham was sitting at the entrance of his tent during the hottest part of the day, <sup>2</sup> he looked up and saw three men standing there. As soon as he saw them, he ran out to meet them. Bowing down with his face touching the ground, <sup>3</sup> he said, “Sirs, please do not pass by my home without stopping; I am here to serve you. <sup>4</sup> Let me bring some water for you to wash your feet; you can rest here beneath this tree. <sup>5</sup> I will also bring a bit of food; it will give you strength to continue your journey. You have honoured me by coming to my home, so let me serve you.”

They replied, “Thank you; we accept.”

<sup>6</sup> Abraham hurried into the tent and said to Sarah, “Quick, take a sack of your best flour, and bake some bread.” <sup>7</sup> Then he ran to the herd and picked out a calf that was tender and fat, and gave it to a servant, who hurried to get it ready. <sup>8</sup> He took some cream, some milk, and the meat, and set the food before the men. There under the tree he served them himself, and they ate.

<sup>9</sup> Then they asked him, “Where is your wife Sarah?”

“She is there in the tent,” he answered.

<sup>10</sup> One of them said, “Nine months from now<sup>[a]</sup> I will come back, and your wife Sarah will have a son.”

Sarah was behind him, at the door of the tent, listening. <sup>11</sup> Abraham and Sarah were very old, and Sarah had stopped having her monthly periods. <sup>12</sup> So Sarah laughed to herself and said, “Now that I am old and worn out, can I still enjoy sex? And besides, my husband is old too.”

<sup>13</sup> Then the LORD asked Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Can I really have a child when I am so old?’ <sup>14</sup> Is anything too hard for the LORD? As I said, nine months from now I will return, and Sarah will have a son.”

<sup>15</sup> Because Sarah was afraid, she denied it. “I didn't laugh,” she said.

“Yes, you did,” he replied. “You laughed.”

**21** The LORD blessed Sarah, as he had promised, <sup>2</sup> and she became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham when he was old. The boy was born at the time God had said he would be born. <sup>3</sup> Abraham named him Isaac, <sup>4</sup> and when Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God had commanded. <sup>5</sup> Abraham was a hundred years old when Isaac was born. <sup>6</sup> Sarah said, “God has brought me joy and laughter.<sup>[a]</sup> Everyone who hears about

*it will laugh with me.”<sup>7</sup> Then she added, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”*

Patience - do you have any? A leading question I know. Perhaps like me, it depends on what you are required to be patient about. I have the patience to paint a wall and wait for it dry. I have the patience to bake a cake and wait for the timer to tell me it is ready to take out of the oven. I just about have the patience to ignore a present that has arrived early for my birthday, but only if I can't see it!

But in other circumstances I find my patience wearing thin. I am not very good at waiting. I remember the time when we were looking to buy a house. Having found the place of our dreams we then had to wait...and wait..and wait, until finally hearing whether or not our offer had been accepted. It was a difficult time for me.

So, yes I am patient - sometimes. And yes, I'm not patient at all at other times.

Perhaps the time when I need patience most, but sometimes find it hard, is when I pray asking God for something. It might be for healing of someone I know who is unwell. It might be for someone I love to come to faith. It might be for an answer to a problem that just doesn't seem to have a solution. I pray hoping for an instant answer, but that often doesn't come. It almost feels as if God is ignoring me.

Today's Old Testament reading is a demonstration of patience, and lack of patience. Abraham and Sarah had been told many years earlier that Abraham would have a son. Year followed year, followed year, and Sarah was unable to have any children. I wonder how many nights she lay awake praying that God might answer her prayer, and fulfil his promise. But nothing seems to happen - did she feel ignored? Finally, in desperation, she decides that she is the obstacle to this promise coming true, so she tells Abraham to take her servant Hagar as his second wife, so that he may have a child through her. This does happen, but God tells Abraham that Ishmael, Hagar's son is not the promised son and that it is Sarah who will be the mother.

This promise is repeated in today's reading. However, it has come so late in life that Sarah, instead of being uplifted and joyous at the renewed promise, just laughs. I don't think she is laughing with joy and delight. I think it is a hollow laugh of cynicism and despair. She has waited all this time and yet God still hasn't fulfilled his promise, and yet someone is here promising it will happen within the year. Perhaps it is no wonder that she laughed.

Poor Sarah. She'd held onto God's promise as long as she could. Then she'd taken it upon herself to engineer a situation in which Abraham would become a father. Nothing seemed to be going right. You can read the story from Genesis 16 - it didn't turn out well.

But then we read that following the renewed promise from these strangers, Sarah does become pregnant and she and Abraham do have a son. They name him Isaac, the name God told them to give their son, which in Hebrew means 'he laughs'. The promise was kept, the prayers answered.

Have you ever prayed and prayed for something that never seemed to happen? Did you then think that perhaps you were the problem? Did you then think that you could solve the situation, answer the prayer, yourself? Did it work out well?

This story shows us that God keeps His promises. His timing might be a great deal different from ours, but He keeps His promises. Sarah thought she could solve the problem herself, and at this point God could have abandoned Sarah, or us if we do the same thing, to whatever the outcome of her or our interference would be. But He doesn't do that. He stands by His promise and when it was humanly impossible for her to have a child, he does the divinely possible and gives her a promised child.

Do we ever laugh at the things that God is promising us? We read in Scripture of God's promises to restore His Kingdom, but then we look at the state of the world and all the problems in it - do we laugh with derision and disbelief? Or do we believe and know that in God's timing that promise will come true?

The whole of the Old Testament tells of God's promise to restore his people, and that He will do it by establishing His mighty kingdom that will rule forever. There would be about four hundred years of silence between the end of the Old Testament and the voice of John the Baptist announcing the imminent arrival of the Saviour and Messiah they were all waiting for. Although the wait seemed to go on and on, God kept His promise. He keeps all His promises. The promise he made to Abraham and Sarah which He kept, is just one of many, many promises God makes in the Bible. They did have a son. Abraham did become the father of a mighty nation. His descendents are more numerous than the stars in the sky.

God promised to take the punishment for all our sins and to restore our relationship with Him when Jesus died on the cross. God promises forgiveness of sins for all believe in Jesus and repent. God promises to send his Holy Spirit into the hearts of all who repent and ask. God promises that one day His Kingdom will be restored on earth, as in heaven and that those who believe and trust in Him will live forever in His company.

In these difficult times when there seems to be so many issues in the world that need solving, we need to remember that God keeps his promises. When we pray God promises to hear our prayers and to answer them. His timing may not be our timing. His answer may not be the answer we expect or want. In retrospect, there are times in my life that I am grateful that God didn't answer my prayer the way I thought He should! We can be sure that God loves us dearly and will answer our prayers, sometimes in ways that are

beyond our understanding or expectation - so keep telling Him your worries, keep sharing your hopes, dreams and thoughts with Him.

Jesus promises 'I will be with you always, to the end of the age.', so claim that promise for yourself. God always keeps his promises.

Be patient!

Music:

Lincoln Brewster - I will wait <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NswPPVgMaPE>

### **Prayer and Blessing** (based on a prayer by Nick Fawcett)

Living God,

Help us to remember that you are a God who never sleeps,  
a God who always hears the prayers of His children.

A God on whom we can depend in any and every situation.

When we feel lost and alone,  
teach us that you are there.

When we feel overwhelmed by trouble,  
unsure of our ability to get through,  
help us to remember that you are close by.

When we feel uncertain of the way ahead,  
fearful of what the future may hold,  
teach us that you are watching over us.

Help us to understand that, whatever we may face,  
you will guide and guard us,

protecting us from evil

and enfolding us in your everlasting arms,

and in that knowledge may we meet every day with  
quiet trust

and glad thanksgiving,

in Christ's name. Amen