

Proper 6 Year A 2020  
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC  
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Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7      Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19      Romans 5:1-8  
Matthew 9:35-10:23

When my niece was very young, she was asking her grandmother about kindergarten. My Mom, the Grandma, remarked, “I was so smart I didn’t have to go to kindergarten,” to which my sweet little niece said “Yeah, right.” That is the type of laugh we hear from Sarah: a “harrumph” of disbelief at the incredulous notion that she, a very old woman, would have a child. The birth of Isaac her son turns Sarah’s laughter of disbelief into one of faith. God’s promises are true whether we believe them or not. God keeps God’s promises.

In light of Sarah and 100-year old Abraham having a child, maybe we can believe that nothing is too wonderful for the Lord. God wants us to believe that God is active in our lives, and shows us over and over again that God is with us.

We cannot claim to know what God will do with the duration and outcome of this pandemic, of the erupting outrage – once again – over racism and misuse of power. We must trust that God is with us in illness, anger, and in every calamity that we face. At the same time, living into a faith-filled life often means that Jesus turns our lives upside down, just as God did with Abraham and Sarah’s life. In what ways has your life been upended since March of this year? We could not imagine that staples in our lives - flour, cleaning products and toilet paper – would be unavailable for months. We could not have imagined how absurd our lives would be in this spring of 2020. Think about how your life has been turned upside down in the past few months, and may continue in this unusual manner for many more.

Not all of the disruption is bad when we seek God in every situation. We might be learning to pray in new ways and in new places – at home, by listening to a podcast or recorded prayer, by sampling many live-streamed worship services. There is power in the practice of praying in new ways, in solitude and in community. You/we are making real the disciple Paul's counsel to pray without ceasing. Keep praying, friends. God keeps God's promises. Nothing is too wonderful for the Lord.

We might be learning to use what is at hand, minimizing our trips for all of the things we have become accustomed to purchasing from others: food, personal care, entertainment, distractions – did we buy everything? I hope that we will retain some of what we are learning: that simple can be good, that family time is indeed priceless, that the use of technology can bring us (sort of) together. I hope that we remember that we are creative, imaginative creatures and that our lives did not stop when we were told to stay at home. Many people did not stop working; I hope that we remember to say thank you to all who continue to serve our needs and desires. Thank you. Thank you.

I keep being shown that I am not in charge, and that a great many things are well beyond my knowledge and control. A landscaper dug up my sewer and water lines. My quarantine response was “okay,” and I put my collar on and left for work. What could I do? I think on that day that God was laughing; my disbelief was not about the wonders of God but of the absurdity of humankind. And God gave me laughter that day.

Not all of the disruption of our lives can be fixed by a plumber or a handyperson. (Yes, the plumbing pipe was repaired – and the water line, too!) My disbelief comes daily as I track the Covid-19 statistics for the diocese and for my own

knowledge. On some days, watching the trend lines in SC is more than I can bear, and I step away from the charts for a few days. Knowledge, it is said, is power, but knowing how many people are sick and dying gives me no power to stop this pandemic. The only power I have in this situation is the power of prayer and the power of a loving, compassionate God who is with us in this mess. I have to believe that God is with us; I have to believe all the way through my own disbelief. Knowing that prayer changes me helps me actually believe what my colleague writes every day: pray with us to change this broken, beloved world. How outrageous to think that prayer will change the world. How outrageous to think that Abraham and Sarah would have a child. How outrageous to think that God would come to this world and redeem it. Unbelievable. And true.

How, then, do we respond to this time? We remember that Sarah's response was, at times, horrific. From a core full of jealousy, she banished her slave Hagar to the desert to die. Broken Sarah; still God's beloved. Hagar and her son lived. Nothing is too wonderful for the Lord. I wear a mask in public; I don't know if it does much good. I do know that it does no harm, and for a rampant virus for which we have no single remedy and no cure, wearing a mask and trying to distance and washing my hands are the few things that I can do. It does no harm, and may do some good, may provide healing, may give God a chance to break in and redeem us again, in ways in which we cannot imagine. Nothing is too wonderful for the Lord.

The big laughter of deep joy that Sarah had at the birth of her son has not yet come for me. I, too, yearn for Holy Eucharist in (big!) community; I am trying to live into this Exodus time, of finding deep truth, God, in words, in lament and quiet. God is present. Still I say, and write, and pray,

Come, Lord Jesus. To us all.