



The Nourishing Vocation Project

Engaging the Living Word

[Genesis 18:1-15; 21:1-7](#)

What is this particular text?

- Story
 - Ancestor story
- Promise
- Doubt & hope

How does the text function within the scriptural story?

- Different human responses to God
 - Abraham runs to take action.
 - Sarah laughs.
 - Whatever the human response is, God continues to bless
- God creating something new out of unlikely circumstances
 - God has strategies that we can sometimes hardly imagine
- Continuing the family tree throughout Genesis

How can this text function in the church today?

- Invitation to consider the variety of ways in which God responds to our prayers
- Where/how is God calling us to do?
- How do we respond to God's call?
- What are the promises of God that sustain us even in our doubts?

What does the text do to you? How do you react to the text? What feelings does this text engender in you?

- It's relatable – I've laughed at God's plan many times
- Creates a sense of wonder of what God can do and how God can work in our lives
- Makes me wonder how one might respond if God doesn't come through in the ways in which we hoped

What do you have to say to the text?

- Why three men?
- Why did God wait so long to give Sarah a child?
- God has a snarky sense of humor.

What do you see through this text from the story itself?

- We respond and react to God's call in different ways.
- God provides, even when we think God's plan is ridiculous and unimaginable.

What do you see from within your church/community/world? (2022)

- The church often wants to remain static, and when new opportunities arise, they are sometimes quick to brush it off and hang on to what they have always done.
 - God could be providing a new way of ministry that seems absurd or unlikely to work.

- Even in unlikely circumstances, people show up to do ministry and new things are born out of the uncertainty.
- Communities find growth in trying new things, looking for needs as they arise
- Crises of our current time
 - Ideologically divided society
 - Divisions sometimes prevent us from seeing what God is doing in our world.
 - New things that have been created as we have moved through the pandemic.
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What do you see within yourself?

- Times when God has provided experiences that I thought were impossible
- Times when God has been persistent despite my doubts

What is the context – textual and historical?

- Follows creation
- Follows Abrahamic lineage

What questions does this text raise for you?

- What was Abraham thinking when the three men appeared?
- Why was it three men?
- What did Sarah tell people when God gave her a child?
- Were Abraham and Sarah scared?

What words/themes seem of particular import?

- Laugh
- Return to you in due season
- Too wonderful for the Lord
- Bore
- Everyone who hears me will laugh with me

What is the Gospel / transforming Good News within this text?

- God cares for us
- God will call out to us with promises of love
- God has a vision beyond what we can see and is persistent in calling us, even in our doubt
- We do not need to earn God's promises.
- God's promises cannot be taken away from us, no matter what we do.

What is the as-over-againstness of this text?

- Sarah's age would still make the pregnancy difficult
- The tasks that lie ahead of them still require deep hope
 - They had a child, but what next?
- What others may think of this response from God
 - Would people even believe Sarah and Abraham?

Who does this text say that Jesus is, or if not Jesus, then who does this text say that God is? What does this text say about God?

- God calls us – even in our doubts
- God promises to care for us – even in our doubts
- God is there with us – even in our doubts

What have others said about this text?

- [“When the guests have finished eating](#), they ask, “Where is Sarah?” and suddenly it becomes clear they are no ordinary strangers but divine beings who know the particulars of Abraham's family life and are in a position to do something about it. One (the Lord?) promises to return in

due season and Sarah will have a son. Not even Sarah's private musing is kept from these divine visitors. Overhearing their promise to Abraham, Sarah assesses it in light of her own reality and laughs: shall she have pleasure at her old age, with that old husband? What does her laughter mean? For the first time, Sarah enters the conversation, fearfully denying her laughter. And for the first and last time in the entire Abraham cycle, the LORD speaks directly to Sarah: "Oh yes, you did laugh." Margaret Odell, Professor Emerita of Religion, St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota

- ["Sarah has too often been ridiculed and diminished"](#) by preachers and scholars for her laughter, yet she isn't by God. Like "doubting" Thomas (who asks only for what the other disciples have already received), Sarah laughs at the impossibility of God's promise. Her laughter echoes Abraham's laughter 17:17. She is not condemned or rebuked, but is heard. God hears our disbelief and can work with it. God knows Sarah and hears her pain. Furthermore, Sarah's worth, in God's eyes, is not tied to her being a mother." Eric Fistler & Robb McCoy, Pulpit Fiction

What will I teach or proclaim?

- We can laugh about how God's promises could be and God will still work through and in our laughter.
- There will be uncertainty and doubt. God can handle that.
- Unexpected things will happen... (be specific in naming what those unexpected things are, depending upon your context)
- God calls us today into the promises that were made throughout time, promises of love and compassion.
- God is ever present in those promises.
- We respond to God's call in different ways; sometimes through preparations like Abraham and sometimes through laughter like Sarah.
- You will wonder why...and the answer still may not be clear.
- The things that we ask God for help with may not be answered in the ways that we predict or expect.