

Is Anything Too Wonderful for the Lord?

Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ...

Thousands of years ago, the Bible tells us that God spoke promises into the heart of a 74 year old man named Abram (the one who would later be called Abraham)... and even though Abraham (and his wife Sarah) never had children of their own (the Lord promised that not only would they have a son – but through this son Abraham’s descendants ‘*would be more numerous than all the stars in the sky*’)...

And yet, where our first reading this morning picks up (in Genesis 18) 26 years have passed since the promise was heard (and not only is Abraham now 100 years old and Sarah 90 years old) but they still don’t have a son (and God’s promises seem more like wishful thinking -than something they can continue to hope for)...

In fact, it tells us in verse 11 that, like it is with all women her age, that Sarah’s womb had closed (and even she knew that it was impossible at her age to give birth)... and perhaps that’s why the Bible tells us that when she hears of God’s promise of having a son being spoken again – it tells us that this time - she laughs... laughs at what seems to be - an impossible dream...

You know, this week as I was preparing my message I kept thinking about the killing of George Floyd... and like you, I watched the video that showed him on the ground – under the officers knee (gasping for breath and asking for mercy) – before he would ultimately lose his life... and to think that this man died for an alleged crime involving \$20 (seems even more difficult to fathom) and is the reason why so many were outraged (not only here at home but all across the world) – outraged that anyone should die such a senseless death...

Which is why – like it was for Sarah - who struggled to believe in the promises of God (after she held onto hope for so many years – even though nothing seemed to change) I can understand why some people would laugh – even today – that this is the end of the racial and social divide that plagues our nation (and so many other countries throughout the world)...

And yes, there will be some who will give great speeches – blame and shaming techniques will be cast on many – and our politicians will most certainly do just enough to appease their base while making sure they hold onto power (and always being sure to stir the pot so that the divide between people continues)...

and I only say that, because we've been here before and so many promises have been made in the past that things would change (and yet, the future still seems barren to those who cry out for justice – or those of us who simply want peace)... and for many – it seems like an impossible dream... or, like wishful thinking – it seems too wonderful to believe...

In fact, even in Jesus' day (as you're probably aware) there was a great social divide in Israel... and it tells us in our Gospel lesson this morning in verse 36, "*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd*"... in other words, they were lost people – not because they were bad people – but because those with the message of God's love kept it too themselves...

And who were the crowds?... They were the ones who were not allowed into the synagogues (and especially not the Temple in Jerusalem)... the ones looked upon with disdain (just like some are looked upon today)... and it tells us that Jesus had compassion on them...

But it goes on to say, "*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few*"...

And what is the harvest? – it's the millions of Gentiles who needed to hear about God's love (but instead were looked upon with disgust)... and the laborers who were few (?) (were the Pharisees and Sadducees) who had the message of God (and had a message of peace) – but rather than sharing it (so that there could be a harvest that bore fruit) they refused to go out and share a message of love)... instead, they kept the divide between people alive...

But that's why I personally find great hope in Sarah's story (who after struggling to believe that her own hopes would come true) the Lord asks a question that we can ask ourselves today – "Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?"...

in other words, is there anything too great for God to do... and if there's anything that can bring us together as a nation (and as a people) the answer can only be found in the love of God...

but what does Jesus say?... we need laborers... those willing to live for peace and reconciliation...

In fact, hasn't that always been the vision of the Church? – and perhaps also the struggle – of building up all of God's people and being united not by the color of our skin – or our social class - or the level of education we might possess (but as a

community of believers united together with one thing in common - the love of Jesus Christ) which transcends the barriers that divide people – even today....

It's the reason why St. Paul envisioned the coming together of God's people in the Church as the fulfillment of God's promise to Sarah and Abraham (and an earthly reflection of the Kingdom of Heaven)... in fact, he writes these words in Galatians 3:28, *"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus... If you belong to Christ"* he goes on to say, *"then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."*...

Keep in mind, that was written 2000 years ago (but I share it with you to remind you – that as the Church in the world today) we continue still to have a unifying vision and the potential of being a source of great hope... (in fact, the harvest if plentiful)...

But Jesus asks, "Where are the laborers?"... and where are those who seek peace?...

Let me close by saying (that the message of having faith in what God can do – in our lives and in the world) is probably more difficult in Israel and in the Middle East (than most places)... and it's ironic because that's the place where the Children of God have come from... that's our place of origin...

But there's a Lutheran Church in Bethlehem (that I visited about 10 years ago) called the Bethlehem Christmas Lutheran Church that knows the struggle of finding peace and calm... and it's not that the Christians in that church go around looking for trouble (in fact, they have a school that is open to Muslims and Jews – they have a food pantry that serves people of all faiths – and the building they use for worship has also been used to house refugees)... in fact, they have become known as a 'Light shining in the darkness'...

But the problem is that they're often caught in the middle of the fighting that is always going on between the Muslims and the Jews...

And yet, the continued hope of Bethlehem Christmas Lutheran Church is that one day God is going to sit these two warring parties down and bring about an everlasting peace and security for all people (the same peace this particular church has been modeling for years now)...

And they have a very interesting way of symbolizing this hope – in that the parishioners of that church are encouraged to collect all of the broken glass that

they find from broken bottles that the Muslims throw at the Israeli police (or the glass collected from the broken windows blown out by Israeli forces)...

And they take all of these tiny pieces of war – and in beautiful patterns – they make little stained glass crosses (that symbolize what they believe about the promises of God)... that even when there's chaos, and war, and tragedy, and unrest, and division between people – God's love (when allowed to live within human hearts) can bring people together... and is – the hope of the world...

And the only reason why a church – caught in the middle of a war would do that – is because in that little church *the people still believe* – and have hope - 'in what God can do!'... that through the love of Jesus Christ God can bring people together... and end all strife...

and do you know what – so do I!... because (just as Sarah learned in time – with the birth of her son, Yoitzak or 'Isaac') that nothing is too wonderful for the Lord (and if anyone can bring people together – it's Jesus)

In these troubled times - may our eyes be able to see the goodness of God in this world...May our hearts be warmed by His presence and comforted by His peace...And May our souls ever rest in the arms of our Savior...

(All of this we ask in Jesus' name)... **Amen**

Would you pray with me? – Loving and Gracious Father, thank you for bringing us into your house this morning and bringing to us a word of hope... fill us with your love – so that like your son – we can look upon the world (and all of it's troubles) not with hatred and violence (but with the same compassion that your Son has for us)...

All of this we ask in Jesus' name – Amen...