

Don't you just love this story?!

Picture in your mind a very hot, sunny day...

Now we are not talking hot like in Chicago...

we are talking Middle Eastern desert hot...

Picture this very old man, 99 years old Scripture says,

sitting under the shade of the a tree

during the heat of the day(important point) and

3 strangers show up...

Picture his wife Sarah –90 years old....

wrinkled from the desert sun and bent over from a lifetime of hard work standing at the tent entrance....

eavesdropping on the men's conversation

and she hears the visitors say she shall have a son.

Of course, she starts to laugh who wouldn't!?!

And now, it is not the men talking, but the Lord, God,

himself asks Abraham: Why did Sarah laugh?"

she shrinks back into the shadows of the tent.

She denies it: "I didn't laugh"

The Lord says: "Yes you did".

I feel like it's my kids arguing: yes you did, no I didn't!

I love this story because it paints a vivid, visual picture for us,

it has humor and....

because it has several important teachings for us...

I'd like to reflect upon two:

**Teaching number one (and these are not in any special order)....
the importance of hospitality in our lives and in our world.**

In ancient times, hospitality non-negotiable.

There were no hotels in the desert.

**You couldn't bring enough food to last your entire trip,
so your very life depended upon the hospitality of others.**

There was a code of ethics in the desert that demanded hospitality.

Friend, family or stranger, you were offered food and a place to rest.

**Now, we may or may not expect to be traveling through
a real desert any time soon...**

**But at some point in our lives all of us will travel through, metaphorically speaking,
a "desert time" of our lives.**

**We will all experience times in our lives that feel like a desert:
barren and harsh: when everything that has nourished us,
fed us, given us life, has dried up.**

Times when a relationship fails, our spouse dies or a job is lost.

When our parents get divorced,

or we get cut from the team...

or the love of our life walks out....

it doesn't really matter what the situation is.

**We all have times in our lives when life doesn't feel hopeful,
it is just plain hard and there is no end in sight for our troubles.**

In those desert times, even then, there are still moments worse than others.

We could call them: "In the heat of the day" kind of moments.

In the heat of the day the sun is directly overhead and you can not tell north from south or east from west.

**In the heat of the day moments of our lives...those most difficult times of our lives--- life is just so painful, so confusing,
we can't tell if we are coming or going, we feel so, so alone**

That's when we all need an Abraham and a Sarah in our lives.

We need someone to call out to us and invite us to sit down in the shade: get out of the heat.

Get out of the situation!

We need someone to offer us food –for our bodies, perhaps...

but also food for psyches, our hearts, perhaps even our souls.

We need someone to share something good and life giving with us.

We need someone to offer us a place to rest so we can get our bearings again.

I think it is important to note that Abraham and Sarah did not know these visitors.

They weren't family or their friends.

These men just showed up.

Do I do the same when someone “just shows up” at my doorstep?

How do I treat the people that interrupt my day?

Contemporary hospitality is practicing kindness, open heartedness.

It is being patient with every person you meet:

including the one who cuts you off in traffic.

Contemporary hospitality gives someone asking for some spare change the benefit of the doubt.

Contemporary hospitality means sitting next to the kid who has no friends to eat lunch with.

It means inviting the uncoordinated geek to be on your team.

It means saying something nice about someone who is being gossiped about.

I'm sure we can each think of a million ways we can offer someone hospitality no matter how old or how young we are.

**So much of the pain and violence of the world today,
is the result of people feeling isolated & alone.**

We may have Facebook and the Internet,

but sociologists tell us that people have never felt so alone and disconnected...

Hospitality is just as life saving today as it was in the desert thousands of years ago.

Important teaching number 2:

**In this story, the Lord wondered why Sarah didn't believe
she would have a son in a year's time.**

So then God asked:

"Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?"

**Now maybe, we contemporary people may not feel that bearing a son at 90 is not so
wonderful... ...the point is, for the ancient author,
nothing is impossible for God...**

When we are in the tough times of life,

when we see no way out, no light at the end of the tunnel,

when we have no hope:

we are ought to hear this question ringing in our hearts:

"Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?"

Sarah said yes to God's presence and grace in her life

and she bore a son, Isaac, later that year...

I'm sure she had doubts and questions...I think that is absolutely part of the point.

My own daughter, 13 years ago, was struggling...she was in London just after Sept. 11th and was very upset: a definite "heat of the day" kind of moment.

And she didn't really believe in God...she, as a child, was my agnostic one...

So, with her across the ocean, and me in Palos Park, the best I could do, was to say to her, "Sweetie, I know you don't really know about God...

but, you can say to God: 'Just in case what everyone says about you is true,

I give you permission to act in my life'

and then I hung up the phone....

That is sooo not me!

3 hours later she called me, calm and reasoned.

She told me that she did what I suggested and a peace came over her like she never experienced before.

She decided on a course of action and took steps to resolve her issues...

I'll be honest...her change in behavior and actions was beyond my imagination....

New life will be born in and through us

that will be well beyond our understanding and

perhaps even beyond our imagination,

when we yes to God.

When we say yes to God's spirit flowing in us and through us,

we can trust new life will be born in our lives,

new pathways will open up,

new avenues for hope will be born...

**I love this story,
because it offers us the teaching that
new life, new hope is possible in ALL circumstances
if we say “Yes”
our ‘yes’ is critical...essential...
God will never force God’s way into anyone’s life...**

**When we say yes, God creates new life in us, for us...
and God creates new life for others, through us...**

**I love this story because it offers us and the world the gift of hope....
and for that we can only whisper, “thank you”
Amen.**