

“Is Anything Too Hard for the Lord?”

Liturgical Date: Pentecost 6 (Proper 11 C)

Primary Text: Genesis 18:1-14

Intro:

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text for today, the 6th Sunday after Pentecost, is the Old Testament Lesson from Genesis 18. The title of the sermon asks a question that the Lord asked in response to Sarah doubting what God had said, “Is Anything Too Hard for the Lord?” THE LORD OVER AND OVER AGAIN SHOWS THAT THINGS THAT WE CANNOT DO HE ACCOMPLISHES SO THAT HIS WILL IS DONE.

Whenever one seeks to do something that seems impossible, or at the very least extremely difficult and improbable, there will always be those that scoff “that will never happen” or laughingly say “good luck with that.” But it is a good thing that many throughout history have not listened to the doubters. Imagine if Christopher Columbus had believed that since the world was round he could sail west to reach the east, but thought “Naw, that sounds like it would take a lot of time and effort. I’ll pass.” If our Founding Fathers had said, “We don’t like how Britain is treating us, but forming our own country would be too hard.” And just yesterday was the 50th Anniversary of the first moon landing. President John F. Kennedy set this goal in September of 1962 saying, *“We choose to go to the moon this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard.”* If he had said, “let’s take the easy route and assume we can’t do it, maybe the Soviets can take a shot at it”, it just would not have had the same inspiration, would it?

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These are just some of the many examples of people doing things that once seemed impossible to even imagine. God has created human beings with incredible resourcefulness, creativity, and intelligence. But there are some things we can't do, aren't there? We can't jump off a building and flap our arms to defy gravity. Try to stop a hurricane. We can't even predict the weather right all the time, for that matter! On the other hand, God specializes in the impossible. The Bible is full of God doing and causing things that defy human reason and scientific laws: stopping the sun for a day, a great fish swallowing a man and spitting him out on the shore 3 days later, feeding thousands with a few fish and loaves, and resurrections from the dead. The very definition of a miracle is something that defies the normal way that things operate.

God had promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation. That his descendents would be like the stars in the sky. That all the nations would be blessed through him. And yet Abraham and his wife Sarah had no children together-no a single one. Yet God repeats the promise. And in today's Old Testament Lesson from Genesis 18, He delivers an important update-in person no less. Abraham looks up and all of a sudden three men have appeared. Most Bible commentators see this as an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ with two angels. This must be big news if God shows up to deliver it Himself! Verse 10, *"The Lord said, I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son."*

Now Sarah is not at this dinner meeting, but she is lurking nearby listening at the tent door. And how does she react? *"So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?"* You see Sarah was about 90 years old and Abraham 100. She

was well past menopause and under normal circumstances it would be impossible for her to conceive. So her reaction is basically, “Good one, Lord. That is too hard for even you.” And before we let Abraham off the hook, only one chapter earlier he also laughed when God told him Sarah would bear a son. And in fact the name Isaac literally means “laughter” or “he who laughs.”

Of course God knows Sarah is eavesdropping in the tent. But He asks Abraham where she is and knowing she is listening God utters those words, *“Is anything too hard for the Lord?”* and repeats the promise that in one year’s time a son will be born. Not included in the assigned reading is verse 15. In this verse Sarah denies laughing because she is now afraid that the Lord has heard her. But of course, God calls her on that and knows that she laughed.

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And can’t we do the same thing? We know in our minds that God can do the impossible. We boldly say we believe the Bible, every word of it singing “My Faith Looks Up to Thee.” We sing “Standing on the Promises of God” knowing that what He says He will do, He will do. But truth be told, sometimes we hesitate to go forth and trust God to accomplish His will. Doubt and fear can creep in. Perhaps we dread the hard work that we may have to put in, or an uncomfortable situation we might have to endure. Witnessing to a family member or stranger? “I don’t know if I can do that, Lord. They probably won’t listen anyway.” And we may be tempted to listen to those voices that would discourage us.

A Lutheran Church in Commerce? That will never get off the ground. Hold a Vacation Bible School? You that is a lot of work and we don’t really know how many people will come anyway. And from our VBS yesterday

we learned that St. Paul traveled throughout the Greek world preaching the Gospel. In a vision he received the “Macedonian Call” to go into Europe, but what if he had said “no thanks, I think I’ll stick to the areas I know”? God wanted people to hear the Good News, that “its true” and that is what happened. Some of the regions that Paul went into became and continue to be some of the most Christianized in the world. God is going to do His part. He can do the impossible. Is anything too hard for the Lord? But we must respond in faith. And this often involves some heavy lifting. Long hours on your knees in prayer and time invested in the trenches. Our congregation has come a long way-and we still have a lot of growing to do. He calls faithful pioneers ready to trust God when He said, “My Word will not return void”. THE LORD OVER AND OVER AGAIN SHOWS THAT THINGS THAT WE CANNOT DO HE ACCOMPLISHES SO THAT HIS WILL IS DONE. So stop laughing. Stop doubting. Trust. And go. It’s time.

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In the Army we had a saying, “hurry up and wait” meaning that you often had to hustle to get prepared to do something, but then it may be a while before it happens. And with our Christian walk, it is like this sometimes. God will act in His time, but we must be prepared for when that time comes. A missionary can labor for years with very few converts, but then the harvest comes. And Abraham and Sarah were certainly being taught a little bit about patience. Then it happened. God literally showed up, at their place! At VBS yesterday one of the activities was documenting a “God sighting”, an example of how God is working in our world and lives. And Abraham had an up close and person “God sighting”. And Abraham is humble and hospitable to his guests. Verses 4-8 give specific details about how he sprung into action and made sure a suitable meal was prepared. One

of the prayers we German Lutheran like to pray before meals is, “*Come Lord Jesus, be our guest, let thy gifts to us be blest.*” Stop and think about that for a moment. No only are we thanking God for providing what we are about to eat, we are asking Him to join us-to have table fellowship with us. And you know what? He does. At our regular meals throughout the week, He is with us as well as when we receive the Lord’s Supper gathering around bread and wine-His body and blood-with our Christian brothers and sisters.

In both our Old Testament and Gospel Lessons we see that God is literally a guest in a home. And Abraham and Mary get it right. They want their guest to be comfortable-the guest is God after all! But they don’t “miss the forest for trees” in realizing the most important, the “good portion” is that God is there and being in His presence and Word is paramount.

When we have guests we often think about what we can do to make them comfortable, what we can do for them. We have to be careful to not be like Martha and become too distracted with serving that we miss the point of having company in the first place. And the thing about God is that when He is our guest, when He invades our space so to speak, He as the guest actually delivers more than the host.

God delivers the good news. To Abraham and Sarah it is that the time has come for that long-promised son to arrive. Once it actually sunk in and they realized that the conception and birth of a child at their age was not too hard for God, can you imagine their joy? Not only for them, but for the world. Because as God promised, their descendents would bless the whole world. Among the many great miracles of the Bible, there are other miraculous births in the Bible too. One certainly stands out. One that would be a descendent of the tribe of Judah, one of the 12 tribes from the children

of Isaac, Abraham and Sarah's son. About 2,000 years later an angel would deliver a message to a young woman, who even though she was a virgin, would bear a very special child.

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Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Man, would be born in Bethlehem. A miraculous birth foretold in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New. And as His name means, He would save His people from their sins.

But some reject His salvation. They doubt what God has said, rather than receive it in faith. They may even laugh, "For me? How could God love me? Why would He care to save me?" Yes, we are wicked. We are sinners. We go our own way, not trusting God. Doubting His power. Not trusting His Word. For our sins we only deserve the just payment of death and hell.

Then we hear those blessed words from Colossians 1:21, "*And you, that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, hath he reconciled.*" By the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus the payment for sin has been made and the victory over death secured. How can it be? I once again ask you, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" THE LORD OVER AND OVER AGAIN SHOWS THAT THINGS THAT WE CANNOT DO HE ACCOMPLISHES SO THAT HIS WILL IS DONE. A mere man could not have done what Jesus did, because all mortal men are corrupted by sin. But Jesus as God and man was the perfect sacrifice for sin. He is the firm foundation for the saints of the Lord. In the fullness of time, God came and defeated sin, death, and the devil. We have been reconciled to our Father, through Jesus, by the power of the Holy Ghost. By our own strength and works this is impossible, but for God nothing is too hard. Amen.