

Laughter is a good thing; it's the best medicine, they say. I love to laugh. Our family jokes around and tries to make each other laugh every day. Sometimes, it's the not-so-funny "dad jokes" and sometimes, it crosses a boundary that someone may not see the humor in it. Sometimes, it's a belly laugh that makes every muscle relax, and sometimes, it's a pity laugh. One may see the humor in the attempt, but it's really not worthy of a full-on laugh. Many times, the laugh is shrouded in sarcasm. There are many types of laughter. What causes someone to laugh depends on the situation and what is going on within that person – whether or not they are in a good place to see the humor.

Our scripture today provides a story filled with different types of laughter. There are some implied details though that I'd like to point out. Verse one says, "The Lord appeared again to Abraham." Well, first of all, the word again connects this story to the previous one in the previous chapter. God appeared to Abraham to tell him of the covenant that they are creating together, and that Abraham would be the father of many nations. Abraham obeyed many parts of the covenant that God laid out for him until he got to the part about being a father. Abraham did bow down in worship, but "he laughed to himself in disbelief" (Genesis 17:17). He was 100 and Sarah was 90. This was just so far-fetched, he didn't see how it could actually happen.

However, he didn't outright reject God. He did bow down in worship, but there was a part of him that he kept quiet. A part of disbelief within himself that he withheld from God. I'm sure it was more like a "Yeah, right" laugh. Not overtly laughing in God's face, but a half-hearted laugh, not fully understanding how God can do miraculous things.

Even though Abraham didn't voice this laughter, God still knew. We often

think we can hide those snide comments deep within us from God, but God knows what's in our hearts. God knows the parts of ourselves that we try to hide, the ones that are steeped in doubt and disbelief, the ones that we know we need a miracle but we're too afraid to let God show up and do miraculous work. Yet, God still strives to bring us to laughter.

In the second part of verse one of this scripture, we, as readers, are in on the miraculous appearance of God. Abraham doesn't know that the visitors are God. We do, because scripture says, "The Lord appeared to Abraham." And, in another chapter that refers to this story, we learn that the Lord and two angels visit Abraham. Abraham does respond in verse three, to the visitors, as "my lord," but he doesn't know that this is THE Lord. Not yet.

Abraham called the visitors "my lord" in an attempt to make friends rather than enemies with these travelers who happened upon their dwelling. This is common place in their nomadic culture. Abraham's group has made camp in the middle of the desert where there was probably no place to hide or escape if the travelers appear to be a threat. After all, Abraham and later Sarah are in the tent, trying to escape the beating-down sun. There are no shade trees or caves if a retreat is needed.

When Abraham calls the travelers "my lord," it's similar to calling him "sir," a respectful gesture. Their hospitality customs required that all travelers who approached their dwelling were to be offered the opportunity to rest and eat. Again, they are in the middle of the desert and looking for water and shade. Abraham offers them a "simple meal," yet the meal he actually provides is extravagant. It's no fast food either – it takes time to slaughter a calf and cook it, as well as bake bread from scratch, especially with ancient equipment. This

shows Abraham's generosity and gives us a glimpse of what is in Abraham's heart. The travelers stay with them for quite some time. They aren't just passing through. Sometimes, it takes a long time to see the divine among us, and especially to be open to the good news the divine brings, like the good news they deliver to Sarah in this story.

While the travelers are eating, Sarah remains in the tent, probably due to the custom that women did not eat with men. The travelers don't try to break the custom, but they do ask where Sarah is. She is nearby, eavesdropping. When she hears the good news, that she will have a son a year from now, she also "silently laughed to herself" (v.12). This was the one thing she longed for, her whole life. She probably dreamed of hearing these words like some women might long to see the plus sign on the pregnancy test. Yet, she knew the practicality of the situation. She had been in menopause for a long time, so she gave up on this dream of having a child. She had already intervened in God's plan with her scheming with Hagar and Ishmael, and it was a disaster. So, Sarah was not in a good place right now. There was a part of her that she withheld from God too.

Like Abraham, Sarah didn't overtly laugh in God's face either. It was the "Yeah, right" laugh, or the bitter outburst – "What?! Now, I can have a child?" or the silent mocking of a miracle. Even though Sarah doesn't vocalize the laughter, God knows. In fact, God calls her out. God asks, "Is there anything too wonderful or too hard or too miraculous for the Lord?" In this moment, when the divine is revealed, Sarah begins to spiral. She becomes aware that the traveler must be God since her silent laughter became known. Her fear of the Lord causes her to be dishonest about her actions. But, then, God holds her accountable for the hole she keeps digging

for herself. These are pieces of the puzzle that show us that Sarah is just not in a good place to see the humor in the situation.

You may interpret Abraham's and Sarah's laughter to mean something else. The Greek word that was used for laughter in these verses can mean to laugh either in merriment or scorn; to sport, mock, or play. Those are very different laughs – laughs steeped from merriment and joy or laughs brought from scorn and mockery come from very different places within. It seems like both Abraham and Sarah laughed as a form of mockery at the absurdity of it all – to be parents after all this time. But, once they come clean with God about what is deep down within them, when these hidden parts are revealed, God turns their laughter of disbelief into joy and merriment.

Sarah gave birth to a son, Isaac, just as the travelers said. The name Isaac means "he laughs." God turns their mocking laughter into joy, a big belly laugh of pure happiness. I asked this question during Children's Time, and I ask it again: How does your faith invite you to laughter? Is there a part of you, deep down, that mocks God's miracles? Are you in a bad place in which you just can't see the surprises God has in store for you, that you withhold a piece of yourself from God? You try to hide your doubt from God.

Take it from Abraham and Sarah. We can't hide those broken pieces within us from God. God wants to reveal to us all the intricate divine details that bring us to laughter. Abraham and Sarah were brought to laughter. They were brought from disbelief and bitterness to joy and merriment. That's the kind of laughter associated with God. God wants our faith to take us to a good place within us, one that sees all the goodness that God brings into our lives, one that sees that nothing is too miraculous or too hard for God. Laughter is a good thing; the best medicine. May God

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bring us all to a life filled with laughter.
Amen.