

The Appointed Time

Genesis 18:1-15

June 18, 2017

First United Methodist Church, Lindstrom

(This is a manuscript prepared for sermon delivery and may not represent actual words spoken.)

“Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son.”

Okay...so we know the story of Abraham and Sarah and God’s promise to them of a son. In Genesis, chapter twelve God promised Abraham that God would make Abraham into a great nation. This meant Abraham, who had no heir at the time, would have a son. Abraham was seventy-five years old when God made that promise. The promise was affirmed in chapter fifteen. God promised Abraham that Abraham’s descendants would be more numerous than the stars in the heavens. Abraham’s son Isaac was not born until chapter twenty-one.

So...only ten chapters from the time God promised Abraham many descendants until the birth of Abraham’s son. But do you know how many years passed? Twenty-five! God promised Abraham that Abraham would become a great nation. God promised Abraham that a son would be born to him and Sarah. Abraham was seventy-five years old. One would think that the promise had better be fulfilled soon. But it was twenty-five years. And get this...it was another sixty years before Isaac had a son. So eighty-five years passed between the promise and the arrival of descendant number two. And God was going to make Abraham into a great nation!

No wonder Sarah laughed. Allow me this confession: I don’t blame Sarah at that moment in her life. It is kind of funny. Let me tell ya that it is not irreverent to laugh. Put me in that situation and I might have laughed, too. In fact, I have laughed. Cynicism has been an ever present companion of mine.

In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, we find that great definition of faith. Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we

do not see. Sure and certain? (As some of you have heard me say, I think certainty—not doubt—is the opposite of faith. I stand by that assertion, but that is a discussion for another time...maybe when we pick up our study of Hebrews next fall.) After that definition of faith, there is a list of men and women who seemed to demonstrate assuredness and certainty. The one who gets plenty of ink is Abraham. Twelve verses are used to lift up Abraham’s faith as an example for us. I’m glad Abraham is used as an example because his faith was seasoned with doubt.

I am going to make a slight turn here. I want to tell the story of Abraham and Sarah with a bit more detail...some added detail. For our call to worship today I read from the fifth chapter of Romans. “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...” For many people that is the extent of faith. We accept Jesus as our Savior. We decide to follow Jesus. We place our faith in Jesus. That’s it. We exercise our faith to get into heaven. Then we go about life on our own.

Faith is so much bigger than that. Faith in God means we trust God for more than just saving us from sin and death. We trust God for more than a ticket for a ride to heaven. Faith means we trust God with our entire lives. All of it. We give who we are and what we have over to God. We trust God with everything. We trust God with our future...our future that precedes our eternal future in glory.

You see, that’s what Abraham was asked to do. God did not come to Abraham and say, “Hey, Abe, I want you to trust me and believe in me. Then when you die you will get to live with me in heaven.” No. God came to Abraham and said to him, “Leave your country and your people and your family and go to the land I will show