

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, Wash.
February 28, 2010**

Genesis 18:1-15

Lenten Lessons from SARAH!

1. *We are children of a promise*
2. *We all need a stronger faith*

**Hymns: Remember Your Love – 119 –
117 (1-5) – 402**

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

Genesis 18:1-15 –

The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way-- now that you have come to your servant." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say."

So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of fine flour and knead it and bake some bread." Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.

"Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "There, in the tent," he said. Then the LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him.

Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?"

Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son."

Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh." But he said, "Yes, you did laugh."

What do the following things have in common?

- The disposable diaper
- The windshield wiper
- The grocery bag
- Liquid paper
- The dishwasher
- Computer language
- Vacuum packed canning
- Home diabetes test
- Car heater
- Fire escape
- Refrigerator
- Life raft

All of these items were invented by women. Some extremely intelligent women have passed down important things to us. Men, inventions like the circular saw and the engine muffler were also devised by women!

As we worship together during the Sundays of Lent, we are going to learn a lot from women. Beginning with Eve last

week, our services are each focusing on a woman from the Bible that we can connect with the season of Lent. **Today we talk about a woman from the OT, Sarah, the wife of Abraham. Let's learn two Lenten lessons from her today!**

1 – We read in Genesis 18:
“Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.” The Lord and two angels appear to Abraham on this ordinary day! Abraham then proceeds to invite them to stay and enjoy a feast that he and Sarah will prepare. We're not sure if Abraham immediately knew who these visitors were, but it became clear quite soon.

After the visitors had eaten, we read, *“Where is your wife Sarah?” they asked him. “There, in the tent,” he said. Then the LORD said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.”* What's important to note here is where the action is coming from. Who is initiating the action and who is receiving the action? We obviously see that the Lord is the one who has appeared to Abraham (Abraham couldn't “appear” before the Lord at His throne in heaven even if he wanted to!) The Lord is also the initiator in delivering this message that a son will be there for him and his wife at the same time next year.

If we reflect on the history of God and Abraham before this event, we see that this fact is nothing new. God has been the initiator of their entire relationship!

- God appeared to Abraham in Genesis 12 with promises: *“Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those*

who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

- God had led Abraham and Sarah to the Holy Land
- The Lord had blessed Abraham with so many riches that Abraham and his nephew Lot had to separate
- The Lord appeared in Genesis 15 and said Abraham should count the stars and then believe that his descendants would surely outnumber them
- The Lord had given Abraham the covenant of circumcising the males of his household
- Now the Lord gives more information on the son that is to be born to him and Sarah

There is no doubt that Sarah and Abraham are “receivers” of God's action! Any doubt that this is true is erased when we consider their sins and shortcomings before their holy God. Abraham had lied about his wife Sarah to the king of Egypt, calling her his sister. He was afraid the king of Egypt would kill him and take Sarah as his wife. Then there was also the unfortunate lapse of faith Abraham and Sarah had when they thought that he should father their heir through her maid, because Sarah was beyond the age of bearing children. Abraham fathered Ishmael through the maid, who was the ancestor of the Arab nation. But this son was not to be the heir of the promise. **Their relationship with God was not based on them being “doers,” but on his gracious promises and action!**

We see the fulfillment of the promise of a son in Genesis 21: *“Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the*

LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him.”

The best thing Sarah and Abraham would receive from the Lord was the later descendant of theirs, Jesus Christ. Last week we heard God’s promise to Eve - A Savior would come for mankind. Sarah’s son would be the ancestor of this Savior. When they were lost in their sins and in need of a Savior from hell, their own descendant Jesus would be born into the world to take their sins to the cross of Calvary. **They indeed could be called CHILDREN OF A PROMISE!**

This is the first lesson for us today from Sarah: We are all children of a promise. We, like they, are not “doers” when it comes to our initial relationship with God, or how we get right with him! Just like Sarah and Abraham, we do not deserve a thing from our holy God. We are lost in sin also! We are losers.

I can’t help but think about the Winter Olympic competition as I consider that:

- I saw many skaters that had practiced long and hard, but ended up falling on the ice and losing.
- A speed skater from the Netherlands, Sven Kramer, beat the competition by four seconds, but forgot to change lanes on lap 17. He was disqualified.
- Seattle’s own Apolo Ohno, a short track speed skater, skated in the final of his best event, the 500 m. He was in fourth place on the last lap, and tried to pass. However, he ended up pushing

the third place skater and wiped out the other three! He was disqualified.

Looking at those losses, we have to admit we are spiritual losers:

- Have you fallen hard? Have you succumbed to temptation and felt the guilt of a shameful sin?
- Have you made a bad choice and “picked the wrong lane?” Was it on a day you were dominated by your sinful nature? Are you suffering the consequences of it?
- Have you “pushed” someone else and hurt them? Have you hated? Have you slandered? Did it feel good?

As sinners, we must admit that we are spiritual losers! *“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”* Paul writes in Romans 3.

When it comes to us getting right with God, thank goodness today we learn that just like Sarah, we are **children of a promise**. We are receivers of God’s action! Listen to Scripture’s words:

- *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-10)*
- Or listen again to part of our lesson from Galatians 4, which describes how Ishmael and Isaac (the rightful son) were born: *“(Abraham’s) son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of*

a promise. ... Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.”

Your salvation does not depend on your own achievement! You are children of a promise, and receivers of God’s grace in your Savior Jesus through faith! What a relief!

2 — Let’s learn a second lesson that we learn from Sarah today. We learn this lesson as we read verses 10-15 of our reading: *“Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, ‘After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?’ Then the LORD said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh and say, “Will I really have a child, now that I am old?” Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son.’ Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, ‘I did not laugh.’ But he said, ‘Yes, you did laugh.’ “*

Sarah didn’t believe it. Why not?

- She was 89 years old at the time (Not many births happen in the nursing home).
- She was barren when she was at a childbearing age in her life.
- It had been 24 years since God had first appeared to Abraham with his commands and promises.

I know what you might be thinking, as encouragement to Sarah. You might be thinking:

- Sarah, think about David! Think about how he went up against the giant Goliath and the Lord was with him! Trust in God!
- Sarah, think about Jonah! Think about how God preserved his life for three days by sending a fish to swallow him and save his life!
- Sarah, think about Moses! Think about how God used him to inflict the powerful plagues on Egypt and how he parted the sea so that God’s people could escape the Egyptian pharaoh!
- Sarah, think about Esther! Think about how her bravery in appearing unannounced before the king saved the Jews from a horrible holocaust!

The only problem referring to those stories of faith is that none of them had happened yet. Sarah didn’t know about those people. She knew about Noah, and she knew about Enoch, but she didn’t have the luxury of seeing all the people of faith that we can look back at! **We see from the Sarah’s unfortunate reaction that she needs to have a stronger faith.**

We can be happy that later on she would see the son born to her and would rejoice in him. In chapter 21 of Genesis we read, *“Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Sarah said, ‘God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.’ And she added, ‘Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.’ ”*

It’s interesting that the son would be named Isaac (“laughter”). Every time Sarah

would call her young son to supper, she would be reminded that she didn't believe that God could bring about the great promise he had made!

Do we realize that our faith needs constant strengthening? Really? Sincerely? When might we have a "test of faith" that needs to firmly grasp the hand of the Lord?

- You lost your job. You're angry. You question God. You wonder if you'll be provided for. You wonder if God knows or cares.
- Your marriage is not going smoothly. Could God ever fix this, you wonder. Divorce is going to be the only option, you think.
- You committed that terrible sin. You are so ashamed. You feel so much guilt. Could God ever forgive you? He must surely be getting ready to get back at you for it.
- Your child is straying from the faith. Will God help them? Does he know or care?
- A loved one dies. Are God's promises true to them, or did he desert them?
- You're sick. Are God's promises going to hold true for you?

Just as when Peter was walking on the waves and suddenly had his moment of weakness and began to sink, we can falter.

As a church, we might look at a yearly budget of over \$800,000 and wonder how we could ever get the resources to fulfill it. We might look at something like our building debt, which is scheduled to be

paid off for a number of years or our short term debt reduction that looms over us and say it's hopeless. How can we strengthen our faith rather than succumb to the sin of Sarah?

The answer lies in how much we are in the Word of God and how much we receive his forgiveness and strength in the Lord's Supper. This is the way in which God strengthens faith! When you are not in God's house and you are not personally in his Word, your faith will suffer for it!

May the season of Lent give us opportunity to reflect on our sins and on our weakness of faith. May we be led to repentance over our sins. May we also bolster our faith in the Word of God this Lent, taking advantage of the two opportunities to worship each week.

Rejoice in the two lessons we learn from Sarah:

- 1. We are children of a promise**
- 2. Yet our faith will continually need strengthening**

May God help us in future Sundays to learn more from women of the Bible! And may we walk closely with him this Lent and all our life! Amen.