

**September 24, 2023 Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church**

**Genesis: 18:1-5**

**"Resilience: Find Humor in Everything"**

**Douglas T. King**

The mood was tense. It was too late at night. Bill and Jane were both tired, spent, cranky. Weary from the demands of the day and frankly weary of each other and the demands of the other. They had been arguing. One of those arguments that spouses have about how they spend their money, or how to raise the kids, or about the in-laws, or about some messy amalgam of all those sorts of things. You know those kinds of arguments. Neither person was in a place to be rational about whatever had started the whole thing and I am not so sure either could quite remember.

As the bickering continued, Bill wandered into the kitchen and returned with three eggs. Jane stopped in mid-sentence, wondering what point he was going to make with breakfast food. Bill tossed the three eggs up in the air and began to clumsily juggle them until one landed squarely on top of his head, cracked open, and poured down all over him. He proudly announced, "Remember you fell in love with me for my prodigious juggling skills." Jane burst out laughing. Then Bill burst out laughing. On their very first date he had attempted to impress her by juggling eggs with the same result. As he rinsed his head in the sink the frustration and anger washed away.

Today is the fourth in a series on the Biblical case for resiliency. In this sermon series we are considering the four traits of resiliency which are as follows, number one, practice

mindfulness; number two, every setback offers a transformation; number three, find humor in everything; number four, understanding we cannot control our lives. Today we will consider finding humor in everything.

In Genesis, God's first verbal expression are the words, "Let there be light." And we often hear those words in our ears as a solemn and somber statement spoken to the chaos which is being crafted into creation. Conversely, there is a third century BC Egyptian papyrus that tells the story of creation and God's first verbal expression in the face of the unformed chaos. It is laughter. The first thing God does is laugh. I have to say I have a little creation story envy. As the divine is setting this magnificent mess of creation into shape and form, complete with everything from the duck billed platypus to the giraffe and to all of us in our unique awkwardness, one cannot help but wonder if laughing at the remarkable absurdity of it all was not the most appropriate response.

And I am right there with Sarah as she laughs at the absurdity of God's promise of giving birth to a baby while she is in her nineties. My question is why was Abraham not laughing as well.

In response to this text, the biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann writes, "Faith is not a reasonable act which fits into the normal scheme of life and perception." (Brueggemann, p. 158) I would shorten it myself to just, faith is not reasonable. I believe God revels in the absurdity of it all. God revels in creating new life from ancient Sarah and Abraham; revels in calling the speech impaired Moses to speak for and lead the people to freedom; revels in choosing a rag tag, clueless bunch of fishermen and tax collectors to support the very Son of God.

And, most absurdly, God revels in bringing the vastly imperfect lot of us together today in this room to be the church, the body of Christ.

As we continue to look at these characteristics of what allows us to be resilient, I have been struck by the theme that one of the underlying foundations of being resilient is having a clear vision of reality. In other words, recognizing who we really are and how the world and our God function. If we do not recognize that there is something inherently absurd about our mortal condition, about our placement in the world, we run the risk of being too brittle and unyielding. We can find ourselves decrying that life is not fair. We can find it hard to accept that our best laid plans have gone astray. We can feel that we have been fundamentally denied what we believe we deserve.

But laughter, most especially at ourselves and our own imperfections, is a helpful reminder of the dilemma in which we find ourselves. Finite, mortal beings, trying our very best to be in control of what happens in this world and what happens to ourselves. And the tighter we hold fast to our precious plans the more absurdly elusive they all become. The only guarantee for our future is that it will be full of surprises. In response we can either clench our fists with frustration and anger or open our mouths and guffaw.

In the movie, *Hannah and Her Sisters*, Mickey, played by Woody Allen goes through an existential crisis. First, he is mistakenly diagnosed as having a terminal brain tumor. Then, when it is discovered he has been misdiagnosed there is a moment of euphoria that quickly turns to traditional Woody Allen dread. Even if he is not going to die in the next several days, someday he is going to die. And he has absolutely no clue as to the

meaning of life, as to why we are here, no understanding of ultimate truth. In vain he seeks answers from many traditions but none of them provide him with the answers he seeks. Completely demoralized and devoid of hope he tries to kill himself. Failing to even be able to accomplish this leaves him in utter despair. He aimlessly wanders the streets until he comes upon a movie theater showing an old classic, the Marx Brothers, Duck Soup. He enters in the middle of the movie and sits down in the midst of Groucho, Harpo, Chico, and Zeppo, engaged in satiric silliness, playing on the helmets of soldiers as if they were a xylophone. Mickey finds himself laughing and it as if a great burden has been lifted from him. Perhaps he cannot control his destiny and avoid death. Perhaps he cannot comprehend ultimate truth. But he can laugh. He can enjoy the utter absurdity of his situation. And that is enough.

Lucky for us we are offered much more than that. We can laugh at the absurdity of life, just as Mickey does, and find ourselves refreshed from life's burdens. But we can also laugh as Sarah does at the absurdity of how our God is at work in the world and in each one of us. Sarah's laughter was also filled with joy, with the realization that the promises of God, although they may appear unlikely at times, are steadfast and true and will be fulfilled.

So laugh at the world. Laugh at yourselves. Laugh at the absurdity of it all. But also, laugh with joy. Laugh because we can laugh trusting in this, across the long arc of history, and the twists and turns of each of our lives, and even in the midst of all of our significant limitations and imperfections, God has chosen us to be beloved children; to continue being the church. God is continually bringing all of the divine promises to fruition.

Just as Sarah and Abraham were extremely unlikely parents, and Moses was an extremely unlikely leader and spokesperson, and those reliably inept disciples of Jesus were extremely unlikely choices to be the founders of the church, you and I dear friends, are God's extremely unlikely choice to lead God's church forward in this time and place. If that is not an absurdity worthy of a chuckle, I do not know what is.

We are God's amazingly imperfect, yet belovedly chosen children. When Sarah said "Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?" remember the response, "Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?"

When we find ourselves in those tired and angry moments when all of the limitations of our world and particularly ourselves are weighing us down, we can crack an egg on our heads and laugh. Trust me, it will be worth the clean-up.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Brueggemann, Walter, *Genesis: Interpretation Series*, John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1982.