

**Sermon: 2020/06/14 (2nd Sunday after Pentecost, Year A) -
Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7; Psalm 116:1,10-17; Romans 5:1-8; &
Matthew 9:35-10:8(9-23)_BTR**

It's a bit like the annunciation by the Archangel Gabriel to the Blessed Virgin Mary, isn't it?

But in summertime.

And *thousands* of years earlier:

A strange visitor from Heaven visits a woman who *really* shouldn't be pregnant, and tells her of a miraculous conception.

Mary, of course, wasn't even married; she hadn't had sex.

Sarah, on the other hand, presumably, as an old, married woman, had had sex *many* times over *many* years with her loving husband Abraham, but with *no* success.

She *had* been heartbroken, presumably.

But was, at this 'advanced' stage, resigned to her childlessness.

And so, at the news, she laughed.

Because it *was* laughable.

That God would chose to start a new nation - Israel - by a couple whose best years - whose years of vigor and fertility were *long* behind them.

His selection of them.

Geriatrics of no real wealth or status or renown.

Her having a baby.

It was *nonsense*.

I said the same last week about the the Trinitarian reality of God, and creation in seven days.

And yet those are things we need to take very seriously indeed.

The Trinity, at least.

(There can be no denying it.)

And the so-called "Gospel" that the Apostle Paul describes in his letter today to friends in Rome is ridiculous too.

"*Foolishness*," he calls it in his epistles, again and again: [1 Cor. 1:18,21,23,25, 2:14, 3:19; 2 Cor. 11:1].

Which is *exactly* why he compares it to what happened with Sarah and the Patriarch.

They - those Christians Paul was writing to - they would have laughed like she did.

No one would have believed them!

(About what they, as Christians, claimed God had done: becoming incarnate, submitting to execution...)

And no one would have believe her.

"No one," that is, until there Sarah stood, in front of them, with her bloated belly, and then with the infant Isaac in her arms.

Indeed, she takes ownership of the laughably unbelievable occurrence:

Isaac *means* laughter.

For she was *thrilled* to have been proved wrong by God.

Thrilled to have such an astonishing gift freely given.

And so it is the *perfect* analogy for being 'justified by *faith*'.

To be "justified" is to be "in the right."

Specifically, to be "justified" is to have stood before the judge - in His courtroom, *accused*; to hear the *damning* evidence laid out before the jury and everyone else; to see the gavel poised to condemn you *and then*, (instead), to hear an "*innocent*" verdict ringing out.

This. Is. Us.

Says Paul.

And it really is.

We stand convicted and rightly accused "in the dock."

In the "dock" of Heavenly opinion.

Have no mistake.

Jesus is the standard.

And so, *by gosh(!)*, all of us "stand," then, in a very dark shadow indeed - the moral "shadow" He casts.

But, 'by faith', says Paul, by acknowledging that what I've said is true and meekly asking forgiveness, we are promised *justification*.

To hear that "innocent!" verdict being pronounced over each one of us, and so it is laughable just as Sarah's baby was laughable.

Given the evidence against us - our sins, it is "nonsense," and we should be sooo(!) glad that it also happens to be true.

Imagine how the angels must be shocked to hear us sinners declared free - free to walk into a new life, unpunished - into Heaven.

I was trying to think of an historical example - of a famous, televised trial - where the public too must have been aghast to watch a known felon escape from The Law.

Such cases are all controversial, of course - usually very divisive, so any I mention will be somewhat unhelpful...; distracting.

yet this is the Gospel.

It really is.

Laughable.

Sinners yet, thanks to Jesus, saints.

"Saints" who get to live forever in bliss, with our Savior.

And what about those 'unclean spirits' that He mentions this morning?

Laughable nonsense too, right?

Or no?

After all, He doesn't mention them in the context of a parable - so He's not speaking metaphorically.

And, usually, we would take Jesus at His word, wouldn't we?

Salvation depends on it.

The theology of "justification" that Paul provides to the Church, which is our assurance that it all "hinges" on Faith in Christ's atoning death, is merely an elaboration of Jesus' own teaching about "faith making us well," [see, e.g.: Mt. 9:22; 5:34, 10:52; etc.] and such like.

We take *that* matter deadly seriously and so too we should take the existence of "unclean spirits".

We can't take the Lord literally on one subject and not on the other.

It is when we take Him literally about our having saving Faith, of course, that we find peace

- and not just peace but *joy*.

Another reason to laugh.

Not just with incredulity at what God has done on the Cross for us, but with happiness that He did.

And it's powerful, isn't it?

Laughter.

We've all seen those videos of babies laughing on YouTube.

You can't help but "crack up."

It's *infectious*.

So, are doing it?

Are we laughing?

(Showing our incredulous joy for God and His mercy.)

And are we using laughter in other ways too, to combat evil in the world?

After all, aren't you exhausted by what's going on?

The shouting?

The angry, red faces?

Is it getting us anywhere?

Or is it just "hot air"? - "For show."

Posturing and posing?

[Pause.]

- I say: "*Let's laugh!*"

Let's *laugh* (in ridicule) at the *nonsense* which says one person is worth less than another because of how they look; the color of their skin.

Let's laugh (in scorn) at the nonsense of those adolescents who think wrecking and vandalising neighborhoods and businesses helps improve anything for anybody.

Let's laugh (in thanks) for the progress that this *imperfect* nation *has* made since its foundation, to live up to its ideals: an ongoing work-in-progress.

But remarkably better than most other places.
And let's laugh (in wonderment) at how much our God loves us all.

Let us pray: ...