

Miraculous Expectation

June 15, 2008

(Pentecost 5 - Year A)

Genesis 18:1-15; 21:1-7

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

For the 44 years of my life, I have been someone who never had a pet. As a matter of fact, I did not like cats or dogs very much at all. The Blessing of the Animals was always my least favorite time of the liturgical year because I never knew if the dogs were going to jump on me or if the cats were going to scratch me.

However, while I was on vacation last week, a messenger in the form of Maria Thomas, who sings in the St. Alban's choir and who works at the Waco Humane Society, gave me some incredible news. She had found a puppy that she thought I would fall in love with.

The news came as a shock to all of our family and friends. But, little Grady, who is a 13 week old puppy and who is a mix of a dachshund and a beagle, has now become a part of our family. And, yes, whom I have fallen in love with.

Now, when I tell other people that we have finally gotten a puppy, the initial reaction is uproarious laughter and comments like: "You have got to be kidding. Who would have ever thought that Jeff Fisher would love a little puppy?"

In the Old Testament Book of Genesis, Sarah asks: "Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? God has brought laughter to me; and everyone who hears [this news] will laugh with me."

You see, Sarah is 90 years old and Abraham is 100 years old when God appears to them as messengers in the form of unexpected visitors. And God tells Abraham that Sarah will give birth to a son.

Sarah listens to this conversation between Abraham and God from inside her tent and Sarah begins to giggle at the preposterous news.

The news also comes to a shock to all of Abraham and Sarah's family and friends.

Then, Isaac is born to them in their old age.

Abraham named their new baby Isaac, because the name "Isaac" in Hebrew literally means: "he laughs."

Then Sarah says:

"God has brought laughter to me; and everyone who hears [this news] will laugh with me.

Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

The news of me and my family getting a puppy provoked laughter because the news was so unexpected.

The news of Sarah and Abraham having a baby as senior citizens provokes laughter because *their* news is so unexpected.

Yet, God seems to take great delight - and laughs with us - when God, time and time again, does the unexpected.

I have heard it said many times that if you want to hear God laugh...then just tell him your plans.

For me, when I was 22 years old and a recent college graduate with an accounting degree from the University of Texas, I had big plans.

I planned, that when I was 44 years old, that I would be a senior partner with Arthur Andersen accounting firm, making a ton of money and living in a big house in the wealthy area of Houston called River Oaks.

I planned to be driving a BMW and all set for an early retirement.

But God has a sense of humor.

Instead, at the age of 44, I am now an ordained minister and I am about 28 years away from retirement in the Episcopal Church.

I still drive a Honda, just like I did when I was 22.

But at least now - I do have a dog!

I am sure that God is now laughing his you-know-what off.
For it seems that God takes great delight - and laughs with us - when
God does the unexpected.

Yet, do we expect God to do the unexpected in our lives?
Or, do we think that God wants our lives to continue in a planned and
predictable way?

Claude Payne was the Bishop of Texas in the 1990s.

While Bishop Payne was our bishop, he believed in a vision for the
churches in this diocese.

Bishop Payne's vision was that we become communities of miraculous
expectation.

Bishop Payne's vision was that we would *not* be shocked when God
improved upon our best-laid plans, that we would not burst out in
laughter when God did the unpredictable.

Bishop Payne envisioned that churches like St. Alban's would expect the
unexpected, that we would be confident that miracles *do* happen,
that we would be a community of miraculous expectation.

You will read in the next issue of the St. Alban's newsletter that will
arrive in your mailbox this next week

That we will begin this fall to put together a Five-Year Vision
Implementation Plan for healthy spiritual growth here at St.
Alban's.

I have no idea yet what this Vision Implementation Plan will end up
looking like.

However, I *do* want this plan to include room for us to laugh
uncontrollably at what God will be asking us to do here in the next
5 years.

If our Vision Implementation Plan ends up being a plan that is rational
and reasonable and predictable, then it will be highly likely that
God will look at our plans and burst out laughing.

Because what God has in mind for the community of St. Alban's is

something that will make us double over in laughter like Sarah and say:

“God has brought laughter to us -
For who would have ever thought that St. Alban’s Episcopal Church
would do _____?”

In the Book of Genesis, Sarah was a 90 year old woman who could no longer have children.

Yet, God’s messenger surprised her with unpredictable news, news that she would give birth to a son in her old age.

And Sarah’s response was to burst out in laughter and in disbelief.

Yet, thousands of years later, God’s messenger appeared to another woman,

A young woman named Mary who was still a teenager and a virgin.

God’s messenger surprised her with unpredictable news that *she* would give birth to a son.

However, Mary’s response to this unbelievable news of a baby was *different* than Sarah’s response.

Sarah’s response was to laugh in disbelief.

But Mary’s response was to say:

“Here I am, the servant of the Lord.

Let it be with me according to your word.”¹

Mary did *not* giggle like Sarah.

Mary’s response was confident and obedient.

Mary’s response was different because Mary expected miracles.

Mary expected that God would lift up the lowly and scatter the proud and fill the hungry with good things.

Mary expected that her son, Jesus, would usher in communities of miraculous expectation.

For God takes great delight - and laughs with us - when God does the unexpected.

¹ Luke 1: 38

However, do you think that God stopped doing miracles and incredible things after biblical times?

Or, do you expect God to do unpredictable and amazing things today?

I am here today to witness to the fact that God *does* do unexpected and incredible miracles today.

God changed me into a priest with a dog.

God changed Sarah into a mother.

God changes all of us, each and every day, to be more daring, more caring, more loving.

God changes us into a community of miraculous expectation,
Sitting on the edge of our seats, expecting to experience God's
preposterous and hilarious and miraculous love.

AMEN.

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