

Sermon for June 14, 2026
"A Laughing Matter"

Genesis 18:1-15

One day Jesus went golfing with St. Peter. When Jesus got ready to tee off, he pulled out a nine iron. St. Peter said, "Lord, excuse me, but you don't use a nine iron to tee off. If you do, the ball will go into the water hazard over there. Only Arnold Palmer could use a nine iron and hope to get the ball over the water." Jesus said, "If Arnold Palmer can do it, I can do it."

So, Jesus used the nine iron anyway and the ball went into the water hazard just as Peter had said. Since Jesus had been so gracious to forgive his sins, St. Peter decided to show the same grace to Jesus. So, they gave Jesus another chance. Jesus walked down to the pond to get his ball. When he got there, he stepped out onto the pond, walked across the water until he saw the ball. Then Jesus reached down into the water for his ball. He put the ball back on the tee and started to use the nine iron again. Peter said, "Lord, you know best, but I told you before; only Arnold Palmer could hit that ball over the water with a nine iron. Jesus said, "If Arnold Palmer can do it I can do it." Then Jesus hit the ball into the water again. Jesus had forgiven Peter three times for the same mistake so he decided to give Jesus another chance. Once again Jesus went down to the pond and walked out on the water to find his ball. As Jesus was out there walking on the water looking for his ball a group came up to play and one of them saw Jesus out walking on the water. He fell to his knees and in amazement blurted out, "Who does he think he is, Jesus Christ!?" Peter said, "He is Jesus Christ. He thinks he's Arnold Palmer."

I am not a good joke teller. Maybe my timing is off or something because a lot of time when I tell a joke people don't laugh. Therefore, I don't tell a lot of jokes, but God can tell a joke. You may not realize this, but God has a great sense of humor. The problem is sometimes people don't laugh. Voltaire said that God is a comedian playing to an audience too afraid to laugh.

The story I read from Genesis is a joke. It's a story with a humorous ending. Perhaps more accurately it is a story about a practical joke. Not the kind of mean-spirited practical joke that people play on each other where someone gets hurt or embarrassed, but a practical joke full of grace and love. You see God wanted to bless Abraham and Sarah again, but God wanted to have fun with them too.

One day God and two angels came to visit Abraham with a message. However, God and the angels did not appear as one might expect; as heavenly creatures in bright robes with wings. Rather they just looked like three ordinary travelers. Abraham did what any Godly person would do; he offered them some food and a place to rest. Back then, travelers were easy victims. God commanded that faithful people should always treat travelers with the utmost respect and hospitality. That is what Abraham did. After such hospitality, it would be appropriate for the guest to bless the host. God said, "Where is Sarah, I mean, your wife." Now Abraham should have suspected something when the man knew his wife's name. Yet he just said, "There in the tent."

The traveler then said, "I will be coming back this way and your wife will have a son."

Sarah heard this from the tent and started laughing. You see Sarah and Abraham were very old: like 90 or 100. The Bible says, "It had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women." She had aged beyond the biological capability to conceive and bear children. Maybe this stranger thought that "Old Man Abraham" had a young wife in the tent. or maybe he was just being silly with a jest blessing. Either way this stranger's folly made Sarah laugh. Maybe she imagined two centenarians timing contractions and laughed even more. Then God revealed to Abraham who he was and said, "Why is Sarah laughing? I am God. I can do the impossible if I want to." At that moment, Abraham and Sarah realized that these were no ordinary travelers, but messengers from God. Sarah came out from behind the tent flap her wrinkled face red with embarrassment. She said, "I didn't laugh." I imagine a divine chuckled as God said, "Yes, you did. Gotchya!"

Sometimes in the course of living, God surprises us with a sudden unexpected gift of grace. That is what the story of Sarah laughing is all about. My last year in Seminary, early in January, Melissa started saying, "I think I am pregnant." I said, "Sure you are." It was too early for the doctors to even test to see if she was. It was what we have hoped and prayed for. It would be too good to be true. When we could get a test, they took some blood and told us to call back later that afternoon for the results. When we called, they said the test was positive. I was so dazed I had to ask them if that meant that we were pregnant. When I told Melissa, she started laughing, crying, hollering, and jumping up and down all at the same time. The nurse on the phone must have heard Melissa because she said we made her day.

Since that moment, my life as a parent has been one joyous surprise after another. That is what parenthood is. It's constantly being surprised by the grace of God. God has graciously allowed us to raise these wonderful little people.

Laugh about it! Enjoy yourself. When the God, who invented joy and laughter, possesses us, we are filled with that joy and laughter.

Life is a laughing matter. The problem is that most of us are afraid to laugh at it. We get too caught up in the responsibilities of life to enjoy it, but we serve a God who constantly surprises us with joy. We serve a God who took pleasure in making an old woman laugh and then making her cry for joy at the birth of her firstborn.

Too often, we fail to laugh joyfully at God's grace. Each sunrise is a dawning of Joy for all creation. Each breath is a gift of life. Each moment of fellowship and love is a glorious gift from God. From the atoms to the galaxies, God fills the universe with laughter.

Enjoy your life; God graciously gave it to you. Enjoy the life of your family and friends; they are gracious gifts from God. Remember life is a laughing matter and God, the author of life, is a real joker. God is a joker who loves us with every laugh.

If someday a stranger comes to your door and says "Why were you laughing?" Don't deny it. Remember, it might not be just any traveler. Instead, say, "I'm laughing because my Heavenly Father loves me so much."