

## Worship for Sunday 14 June 2020



### Welcome Call to Worship

As Abraham welcomed the strangers

**So, God welcomes us.**

God greets us with joy

**and says, “rest here for a while.”**

God brings out water to wash our dusty feet.

**God prepares a meal to nourish our weary spirits.**

So, let us receive the gracious hospitality of our God.

**Let us rest in this holy place**

**where there is shade and water, food, and laughter.**

We light a candle

A reminder of your presence

A light in the world's darkness

And we particularly remember those in America

who are fighting against entrenched racism

**Amen**

*Spacious Faith.*

## Hymn – Give to us Laughter

Give to us laughter, O Source of our life.

Laughter can banish so much of our strife.

Laughter and love give us wholeness and health.

Laughter and love are the coin of true wealth.

Give to us laughter as sign of deep joy;

let us in laughing find Christian employ,

joining with stars and with bright northern lights,

laughing and praising and sharing delights.

Why do we worry that we will lose face?

Why act like king for the whole human race?

Often in family, and often with friend,

laughing at pride causes anguish to end.

Even in sorrow and hours of grief,

laughter with tears brings most healing relief.

God, give us laughter, and God, give us peace,

joys of your promise among us increase.

*Words by Walter Farquharson, music by Ron Klusmeier*

## A Prayer for Ourselves

Holy One

Thank you for laughter.

For the chuckles of babies

amazed at all they see.

And for the giggles of children sharing a joke.

Sometimes, as adults, we forget how to laugh.

We think that life is serious

and that laughing at its absurdities is childish.

Forgive us for taking ourselves so seriously,

for forgetting that laughter is your gift.

When there are so many troubles in the world,  
we need laughter more than ever.  
So, in these times of worry, uncertainty, and change,  
may we know once more your blessing of laughter

**Amen**

### **Bible Reading – Genesis 18:1 – 15, 21:1 – 7**

#### **A Son Is Promised to Abraham**

<sup>1</sup> The LORD appeared to Abraham at the sacred trees of Mamre. As Abraham was sitting at the entrance of his tent during the hottest part of the day, <sup>2</sup> he looked up and saw three men standing there. As soon as he saw them, he ran out to meet them. Bowing down with his face touching the ground, <sup>3</sup> he said, “Sirs, please do not pass by my home without stopping; I am here to serve you. <sup>4</sup> Let me bring some water for you to wash your feet; you can rest here beneath this tree. <sup>5</sup> I will also bring a bit of food; it will give you strength to continue your journey. You have honoured me by coming to my home, so let me serve you.”

They replied, “Thank you; we accept.”

<sup>6</sup> Abraham hurried into the tent and said to Sarah, “Quick, take a sack of your best flour, and bake some bread.” <sup>7</sup> Then he ran to the herd and picked out a calf that was tender and fat, and gave it to a servant, who hurried to get it ready. <sup>8</sup> He took some cream, some milk, and the meat, and set the food before the men. There under the tree he served them himself, and they ate.

<sup>9</sup> Then they asked him, “Where is your wife Sarah?”

“She is there in the tent,” he answered.

<sup>10</sup> One of them said, “Nine months from now I will come back, and your wife Sarah will have a son.”

Sarah was behind him, at the door of the tent, listening. <sup>11</sup> Abraham and Sarah were very old, and Sarah had stopped having her monthly periods. <sup>12</sup> So Sarah laughed to herself and said, “Now that I am old and worn out, can I still enjoy sex? And besides, my husband is old too.”

<sup>13</sup> Then the LORD asked Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Can I really have a child when I am so old?’ <sup>14</sup> Is anything too hard for the LORD? As I said, nine months from now I will return, and Sarah will have a son.”

<sup>15</sup> Because Sarah was afraid, she denied it. “I didn’t laugh,” she said.

“Yes, you did,” he replied. “You laughed.”

#### **The Birth of Isaac**

<sup>21</sup> The LORD blessed Sarah, as he had promised, <sup>2</sup> and she became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham when he was old. The boy was born at the time God had said he would be born. <sup>3</sup> Abraham named him Isaac, <sup>4</sup> and when Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God had commanded. <sup>5</sup> Abraham was a hundred years old when Isaac was born.

<sup>6</sup> Sarah said, “God has brought me joy and laughter. <sup>7</sup> Everyone who hears about it will laugh with me.” <sup>7</sup> Then she added, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

#### **Reflection**

Our Bible reading today tells us about Sarah laughing at the absurdity of her having a baby when she was so old. Then, we hear that when that baby was born, she laughed for joy. We don’t hear anything about the

intervening nine months. In the society in which Sarah lived it was very important for women to have children, so surely her pregnancy must have made her very happy. Let's find out. Let's listen to what Sarah had to say after their visitors left.

### **Sarah's Story**

#### ***That evening***

*Yes, I laughed – of course I laughed. The idea that I could have a child is ridiculous. When I was young, I longed to have a child. I would have done anything for a child. In fact, I was so desperate for a child I gave my maid servant, Hagar, to Abraham - and then regretted it. But that was a long time ago. I had accepted the fact that I wouldn't have a child of my own and when my monthly courses stopped - well that was definitely the end of my hopes. Why did those strangers have to come and stir things up?*

#### ***Two months later***

*It's true. Those men were right. I am going to have a baby. It's what I always wanted. I should be happy. But I'm not. I resigned myself to not having children and found things to fill the gap. I made a life for myself and, while it wasn't perfect, I was content. I'm used to things the way they are. I like things the way they are, but now everything is going to change. And I feel sick. I can't keep anything down – even the smell of food makes me vomit. Abraham isn't happy. He doesn't like the way Hagar prepares the food. And I'm tired – so, so tired. I didn't know it was possible to be so tired. What was God thinking?*

#### ***Eight months later***

*I'm too old for this. I'm so big and now my joints ache even more than they used to, and it takes me twice as long to do everything. Abraham is unsufferable. He struts about like a rooster, glorying in his virility. This has given him a new burst of life while I feel as if it is draining mine. If God can make it possible for an old woman like me to get pregnant, surely, he could have made Abraham pregnant instead? I'm scared. Even young, fit women die giving birth – what chance do I have with my old bones, creaky joints, and sagging skin. And if I do survive, that is just the beginning. My breasts used to be full and firm but now they have*

*all but disappeared. How can I feed this baby? And how can I keep up with him once he starts running around? I don't have the energy anymore. There are so many dangers out there – how can I keep him safe? We're bound to die before he is grown up. What was God thinking?*

#### ***Ten months later***

*I can't believe it! I thought I was happy before but that is nothing compared to the joy I feel now. My face aches with smiling so much. And laughing – I don't know when I have laughed so much. When I see Isaac smile, I laugh. When I remember all the things I complained and worried about when I was pregnant, I laugh. I have forgotten my aches and pains – now it is me that has a new burst of life. I guess God does know best.*

Change is hard. It is hard when it is change you want - like Sarah. And even harder when it is change you don't want. Often, we spend a lot of time worrying about the change and focusing on its disadvantages only to find, that when change comes, there are many unanticipated benefits. So, during these changing times, trust God, make time to laugh and always look on the bright side of life.

Wondrous God,  
deep in our hearts,  
so deep, most of the time we dare not repeat it even to ourselves,  
is a prayer for something we need to happen,  
something too wonderful  
for the likes of people like us to accomplish or even to imagine,  
but something that needs to happen for us  
and our world to be wholly what we are.  
Give us again the great hope that the day is coming  
when the impossible will become possible  
and the laughter of our despair  
will be turned into the laughter of greatest joy.  
In Jesus' name we ask it.

**Amen!**

*Rev. Richard J. Fairchild*

### **Prayers for Others**

Nothing is impossible when we work with You, O God

- Then the Government can be held accountable for the plight of low-income families and the lack of adequate housing.
- Then the need for good quality air and the preservation of good agricultural land for our grandchildren will be taken seriously
- Then a good education will depend on the ability of students and not the ability to pay tuition fees.
- Then the elderly will be respected, even if they are no longer in control of their own lives.

Nothing is impossible when we work with You, O God

- We can identify those who are suffering and insist on care for them.
- We can stand beside former prisoners and advocate with prospective employers for them.
- Good quality air and the preservation of good agricultural land for our grandchildren will be taken seriously.
- We can listen carefully to those whose lives are shattered because of addictions and help them find another way forward.
- We can sit with the sick and frightened who have no one with whom to share their fear.
- We will remember Leigh & Dianne and others we know who are coping with ongoing health problems

Nothing is impossible when we work with You, O God

- We will be motivated to discover and work out our skills and strengths to support our ministries.
- We will remember the caring, empathetic work of Jesus and find our own space to do that work in.

Nothing is impossible when we work with You, O God  
We will happily respond and work with the spirit of Jesus.

**Amen**

### **Offering**

Generous God  
During this week we have given time,  
care,  
food and  
money  
to others, and so to you.  
It may seem like a drop in the ocean of need  
but it is given with love  
and we know it is valued

**Amen**

### **Hymn – Sing a Happy Alleluia**

Sing a happy alleluia,  
sing it out with heart and style --  
we're the echo of God's laughter,  
we're the image of God's smile.

Refrain: Alleluia, all creation, alleluia, everyone!  
Alleluia, all creation, alleluia everyone!

We're the proof of God's good humour,  
we're the twinkle in God's eye,  
made to shine, reflect the glory,  
given light and space to fly.

Refrain

Sarah laughed at God's good timing,  
Mary sang and David danced,  
Jesus smiled and hugged the children --  
so is life for us enhanced.

Refrain

Every day sing alleluia!

We are loved, though so absurd,  
human, foolish, chosen people,  
God still takes us at our word!

Refrain

**Blessing**

May you be blessed with laughter,  
with the flexibility to adapt to change,  
and with confidence in the future  
knowing that God is with you

**Amen**