



February 9, 2022
A Note from Pastor Jon

Dear Friends,

As I was reading our text this week for The Great Story (Genesis 18), I yet again noticed something new in this story, which I have read or heard read many times throughout my life.

One of the questions I will often ask of myself when reading a story from scripture is who or what did I identify with in the text. So as I read this week, I paused after reading the first fifteen verses. I didn't even have to ask myself the question of identification, because I found it rather quickly.



In this selection we have God and two others appearing to Abraham. As this isn't Abraham's first encounter with God, Abraham does not seem startled but almost seems excited as he extends generous hospitality (food, drink, washing, shade) to God and the guests.

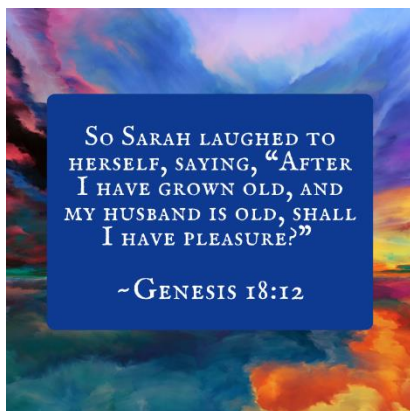
During what appears to be polite table talk, the guests inquire by name about Sarah, whom Abraham indicates is in the tent.

I don't know how far away this conversation was happening from the tent, but we are told that Sarah was just inside the tent, listening, when she heard one of the guests say that when they would return a year later, Sarah will have given birth to a son of Abraham.

Her reaction was a silent inward laugh at this news.

That was it. That was my point of identification in the story — LAUGHTER.

Not laughter at a funny story or joke.



Not laughter at watching a prank or comical sketch.

But laughter, albeit an inward laugh, from hearing something that seems outlandish or downright impossible.

You see, over these last few years since joining you here at Hilliard UMC, I have come to learn that I am an Enneagram 9. One of the not-so-proud traits of Enneagram 9s is that I can often believe and convince myself that everyone else deserves happiness and to have amazing things happen to

them, but not me.

It's really not that uncommon for me to even laugh audibly and not just internally when I hear someone suggest that something special might happen to me.

I, like Sarah, have at times struggled with bouts of doubts.

When I was laid off twice from jobs I really liked, I doubted I could ever keep a job or have a fulfilling career.

When I was deployed and dropped into the unpleasant conditions of a desert in a foreign country during a time of war, there were times I doubted whether I would make it home.

When I went through a divorce after an eight-year marriage, I doubted whether I was worthy to have a loving spouse or a family of my own.

Each time, after each difficult situation in my life, when someone would speak to me of goodness to come my way, I laughed.

Sometimes I would laugh to myself as Sarah did that day, and other times out of my own anxiety and doubt I would even laugh out loud. My laughter was usually a mask for tears or because I really didn't know how I should react.

So Sarah, inside the tent, away from the conversation with Abraham and the visitors, laughed inwardly.

We then read that God calls Sarah out for laughing, even in silence, for failing to realize that she too is within the bounds of the love of God, who wants to see all persons thrive — yes, even the Enneagram 9.

So here's my takeaway and my encouragement for this week: Even when Sarah denied she laughed, God neither condemned her for her laugh nor for her doubt.

By saying "Yes, you did laugh" and moving on, God simply let her know, I hear you, I love you, and I will be with you.

I don't know if you have ever doubted that God's fullness and goodness are God's desire for you and for your life. I know I have, and I can even admit there are times, if I am not careful, when I can still have bouts with my doubts.

But thanks be to God, I know that God sees me, God hears me, God loves me, and God will be with me — and friends, the same goes for you, too!

Pastor Jon



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