

My Father-in-law, Larry is probably one of my favorite people. His kids no longer think he is funny with his quiet one liners that he throws into conversation from time to time, but I however, am about 6 years going strong in thinking he is hilarious.

In honor of Larry and many other Dads in our lives today, I'd like to share Jimmy Fallon's most recent "hashtag all call": dadquotes.

Late night show comedian Jimmy Fallon invited folks to get on twitter and tell their favorite quotes from a dad in their life and tag it by hash tagging "dad quotes". This is what ensued on Twitter:

My sister once asked my dad what he thought of her dating someone named Hansel, all he said back was "I bet you'd reGRETTEL that"

When I was younger I was playing softball and told my dad I was afraid to get hit. He responded with "it's ok, we have insurance"

My Dad used to ask us to turn up the tv by saying "make them people talk louder"

My dad adamantly stated "Essential oils are used to fry onions rings, wings, or french fries. All other oils are NOT essential."

Mom: who should we put as the emergency contact for the cruise?

Dad: The coast guard

To this day, my dad still thinks the lyrics to "I ain't no holla back girl" by Gwen Stefani is "there aint no harm in that girl"

Once my dad went to the grocery store n the cashier asked "if u want the milk in the bag" my dad said, "just leave it in the carton"

As teen, shouted at Dad: it's not your job to embarrass me! He replied "I know." Then smiled n said "it's one of the perks"

Laughter- an ice breaker, a way to connect people—it is a reaction, result or consequence of inconsistencies that most times end up "funny". Laughter can arise from being tickled or hearing a humorous joke or a humorous thought to yourself. When one is laughing, it can show one's emotions: joy, relief, happiness—

However laughter involves a bit of risk because it is always dependent on Age, gender, education, language, and culture are as to whether a person will experience laughter in a given situation. Comedian take HUGE risks when they do standup because they dance a line of funny and offensive.

Laughter can happen when one is sad, doubting feeling hopeless. Laughter can happen as a release of energy—like last week, when Patrick was helping my husband hoist a couch through my window-that was funny. And absurd.

My husband Will is an avid reader of the Sunday funnies. My favorite one is Garfield. Why? Because I can't help but read every comment that cat makes as sarcasm—my favorite kind of humor is the ironic kind, which in many ways makes the Bible very interesting to me. Humor and comic relief where one would least expect it—is all over the biblical narrative.

Our story today is one of laughter as irony- laughter as an expression of Sarah's doubt of God's unpredictable nature.

Our passage this morning picks up mid narrative. I have felt rather close to Abraham and Sarah lately because I identified with this whole "God telling you to go so you go" thing.

Sarah and Abram come to us shortly after the flood narrative and the tower of Babel in Genesis. Sarai and Abram we are told find their home in Haran. Until, that is, God starting stirring up something. God comes to Abram and gives "the first of three divine speeches where a patriarch is given travel directions and a promise"<sup>1</sup>

God tells Abram to leave his home, his country, his kindred and his father's house to the land that God will show him. He also learns that God will make of him a great nation, with descendants that are blessed.

This is the beginnings of God's forming of the nation of Israel, ridden with deep history of the era in the Ancient Near East. Before we get to chapter 18 God reiterates the promise to Abraham and Sarah telling them their new names, but also the

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<sup>1</sup> The New Oxford Annotated Bible, page 27.

promise of descendants—a son to carry forth this divine blessing. God seals this covenant with the mark of circumcision.

One can only hope to be as faithful as Abraham. God says, he does. Faithful Abram. Even to the point of circumcision at the ripe age of 90.

Sarah on the other hand, is relatable in my opinion. She is faithful yes, but also likes to take matters into her own hands. In chapter 15 she forces Hagar on Abraham to make him a son, Ishmael because she knew she was barren and God promised them a lineage. It was the only way she could conceive in her mind how this could happen —“Surely me in my old age and as barren as I am cannot give Abraham this promise that God gives”.

Our passage starts in the heat of the day, where Abraham is “healing” under an oak tree. He sees in the distance three strangers, traveling through—and he immediately rushes to see them. This is an oddity as traveling in the heat of day was not typical in the Ancient Near East. Traveling nomads were taking a risk in that day in age. Lands were occupied by strangers and other peoples with very little public tents or “inns”

Yet they found themselves lucky in the hands of Abraham who quickly did what Ancient Near Eastern Hospitality norms expected him to do—wash their feet, give them rest and shelter, and feed them cakes (6.5 lbs of flour to be exact). They exceeded the terms of the Ancient Near Eastern Hospitality Code.

As these men are settling in they ask for Sarah, by name, which was rare because these travelers are supposed to be strangers—this affirms our hunch that these “three”

travelers may be a divine encounter. Abraham answers the men telling them that Sarah is in the tent preparing food—Sarah hears her name and listens closely—for God’s promise is once again reiterated—  
this time next year, she will bear Abraham a son—HA! This is impossible! There’s no way, I—

“Why did you laugh?” Sarah is caught red-handed on her eavesdropping.

She laughs when God tells her the plans. Not the kind #dadquotes, you’re tickling me, tell that joke again kind of way—but in an ironic way. As an absurdity.

But wouldn’t you? I mean this whole situation is something as about as absurd as a young teenage virgin mother giving birth to God in a barn. All signs in the world tell us that this simply cannot biologically happen!

And then comes my favorite verse in today’s passage: Nothing is impossible for God!

Sarah was laughing at the inconsistency of God’s plans and her logic. That God simply can’t do all things—especially the impossible ones. That God is the predictable type of God- the one we can understand—

This “barrenness” of Sarah left her feeling that there was no way God’s promises could be fulfilled. Yet, where we see barriers and ending points—where we see something as a dead end, God brings forth in us possibility, opportunity, humbling us once more.

Have you ever found yourself laughing sarah's laugh at God?

Perhaps God is tugging your heart to a new field of study. A new job, a new home—a different chapter for your family—one you didn't expect. Maybe God is at work in you leading you to serve in a new way in your community or at your church—I and many others will be headed to New Mexico next week- a place where God will show us and surprise us with much more than we imagined. Sarah's laughter is important because it highlights the nature of our unpredictable God who will go to high lengths using us, God's earthen vessels to fulfill the promises of God.

Through the laughter of Sarah we are invited to worship a God who is unpredictable—a God who fills us with awe and keeps us on our toes—a God whose nature challenges us to open ourselves to what God might be doing in us—where God is sending us—what God has in store

One of my favorite preachers and former pastor of Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago John Buchanan says it best:

"Faith in this God is not predictable. Faith is an openness to the startling, amazing, surprising grace of God coming at us, to us, in the most unlikely and unexpected of ways.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, faith is not about knowing everything there is to know about God. It is knowing that there is plenty about God that we don't know. Faith is not certainty. Faith is acknowledging that God will not be reduced to the limits of human understanding. God will be God, and there will always be surprises.

I worried a bit while writing my sermon this week because I think we can read this passage and immediately jump to some if thens that can be hurtful to us—some if thens that put even more boxes around God than our laughter. Because we could walk away today saying “if we are just kind to all people, God will give us what we want” or “if God helped a geriatric woman have a child, surely if I pray hard enough God will grant us the desires of our hearts. When we read just verse (17) we fall into the trap of Sarah. The trap of organizing our lives to trick God into giving us what we want.

God doesn't and shouldn't make sense to us. What I do know is this: we worship a God who provides us with promise- a firm foundation for us to stand upon and a spirit that is ever within us.

“God will make a way where there is no way,” Martin Luther King Jr. used to say. God will make a way through the sea. God will bring freedom out of oppression, justice out of injustice, life out of death. It's not that God will do everything we ask, give us whatever we think we want, as the prosperity gospel preachers promise. It is that God is God and God will do God's will and it will be a surprise when it happens.”<sup>2</sup>

We worship a God who is unpredictable. Who was glorified in the the things are hard to understand. Who loved those society deemed unlovable. Who called 12 people away from their homes and their lives to follow a man who says he's the messiah.

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<sup>2</sup> John Buchanan, Fourth Presbyterian Church Chicago

For we worship a God who was glorified in death. A god who is most at work on the fringes where we are dreadfully uncomfortable. Serving God should be terrifying because that means God is doing something amazing.

My hope and prayer for this church is that you will join me in opening yourself to see how God might be at work doing the unthinkable in the world with you as part of the story.

Let's keep on laughing at God. Perhaps it will keep us on our toes. For nothing is impossible with God.