

PR372, Fall 2008: Preaching in African-American Tradition

Text: Genesis 18:1-18

Title: "Why are you laughing, World?"

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On a hot ordinary day in the Promised Land, three divine beings visit Abraham to bring a promise. They were on their way to bring judgement to the two cities that closed their door against God. But they stopped by Abraham's tent to bring a promise to them. A promise that the Lord will open their womb to bring a child out of their closed expectation.

"I will surely return to you at this time next year: and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son."  
(Genesis 18:10)

When the word of promise was heard by Sarah, she laughed.

'A child at the age of 90? And my husband is 99!'

The Scripture carefully tells us that Sarah laughed to herself. (Genesis 18:12) That means she laughed within, in her spirit. No one would have noticed her laughing.

Silent and cynical laughter!

The divine being, however, notices Sarah's silent laughter and asks her, "why are you laughing?"

Well, why did she laugh?

Sarah laughed because of the absurdity of the promise.

Absurdity for two reasons:

- 1. The promise contradicted Sarah's situation.
- 2. The promise exceeds human capacity to be realized.

1. The promise contradicted Sarah's situation. Sarah is right about her situation. She is 90 years old. She is well past her menopause. And her husband is 99! And when was the last time she heard the promise? 24 years ago! 24 years have gone by since the word of promise was first heard. The repeated promise now can sound almost like an insult to hopeless Sarah.

2. The promise exceeds human capacity to be realized. She never heard that a woman past her menopause could bear a child. She knows her body and she knows Abraham's body. The promise sounds just impossible.

Contradicting situation and seemingly impossibility of the promise beyond human capacity, the promise sounds absurd! So, Sarah laughs.

However, it is not only in Sarah that we see the silent cynical laughter.

We can see the sound of silent laughter all over the world.

### **Modern World Laughs**

The absurdity which made Sarah laugh is the same reason that makes the modern world laugh.

The promise of the Bible seems absurd!

The Promise seems contradicting our human situation.

The promise seems like beyond our ability.

There seems to be nothing we can do to actualize the promise of God. There is nothing we can do to control in the promise of God. So the modern world seems frustrated.

"Why do you laugh?" The Lord may be asking us today.

"Is anything too difficult for the Lord?"

If we really believe the answer is NO, why do we laugh when we hear the promises of God?

God promises to renew any nations when they seek Him.

"If My people who are called by My Name, will humble themselves and pray, and seek My Face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14)

Why do you laugh, world?

Because this promise seems contracting with the situation that we see in our land?

Because it seem like the materialism, greed, lust, corruption, the impotence of churches, and the social issues to be so pervasive and seem impossible for us to bring any change beyond our capacity?

"Why do you laugh?"

"Is anything too difficult for the Lord?"

On the first Christmas, angel sings, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth." (Luke 2:14)

Peace? Peace on this earth? while we see all the war still going on, and racial conflicts within our own nation, ethnic supremacy, stronger group of people condescending weaker group of people, majority ignoring the voice of the minority? peace on this kind of world? Impossible! and Absurd!

(.....)

"Why do you laugh, World?"

"Is anything too difficult for the Lord?"

Jesus says, "You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of Heaven." (Matthew 26:64)

Coming on the clouds of Heaven? A jewish carpenter crucified 2000 years ago will come back on the clouds of Heaven? Are you joking me? Absurd!

(.....)

"Why do you laugh, World?"

"Is anything too difficult for the Lord?"

"The angel said to the women, do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. "He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said." (Matthew 28:5-6)

(.....)

"Why do you laugh, World?"

"Is anything too difficult for the Lord?"

"Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed." (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

Trumpet sound? From where? The dead will be raised, and we will be changed? Give me a break!

(.....)

"Why do you laugh, World?"

"Is anything too difficult for the Lord?"

"Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away. Behold, I am making all things new. (Revelation 21:3-5)

(.....)

"Why do you laugh, World?"

"I know you are laughing."

"Is anything too difficult for the Lord?"

After one year, when Sarah held her baby Isaac in her arm, what would she have felt?

She probably had felt sorry she laughed.

## **Mary**

Another story is told that an angel visits a Palestinian teenage virgin girl, a descendent of Abraham and Sarah, to bring another absurd news. The news was the same promise given to her ancestor long ago, that she will have a baby!

This time, the task seems even more impossible. She never had sex to make the promise come true. How can a pregnancy ever happen without male sperm?

If there should be one person on this planet allowed to laugh out loud to God, without any contestant, Mary is the one!

God chose to enter into this world through the most unimaginable, implausible, impossible door: a virgin's womb!

Mary said to the angel, "how can this be, since I am a virgin?" (Luke 1:34)

"Nothing will be impossible with God." (v. 37)

"May it be done to me according to your word." (v. 38)

This faith made the Christmas possible and this is what this holiday season should be all about: impossible possibility! God's most absurd entry into the world to save the world!

Contradicting our situation and beyond our capacity!

After 33 years, when Mary held her dead son just crucified in her arms what would she have felt? (repeat of the same question to Sarah)

Tearful cry! (instead of laughter!)

What would Mary think about her Son's promise that he will rise again after three days?

I am sure it would have been, "I don't know how, but may it be done to YOU according to your word, for nothing is too difficult for you, my Lord."

"Is anything too difficult for the Lord?"

This question reminds us that the real issue is not how much WE believe, nor how positively WE think.

The real issue is the object of our faith, the character of God we have faith in.

Who is our God?

Our God is God who brought His Son into the world through the most impossible way.

Our God is God who came up with the most absurd way to bring salvation to this world: Cross!

Our God is God who raised his Son back to life in three days as he promised.

This same God promises us with absurd promises that seem contradicting with our situation and impossible to be realized.

However, knowing what happened to Sarah and Mary, and all the promises that have been fulfilled thus far, we know that this promise giver is also the promise keeper!

So we the people of God, in the midst of the world's silent laughter, say with confident smile, "Nothing is too difficult for you, Lord. May your will be done on this world according to your word."

Amen.