

Genesis 18:1-15

¹⁸The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. ²He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. ³He said, “My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. ⁴Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. ⁵Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.” So they said, “Do as you have said.” ⁶And Abraham **hastened** into the tent to Sarah, and said, “Make ready **quickly** three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.” ⁷Abraham **ran** to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who **hastened** to prepare it. ⁸Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate. ⁹They said to him, “Where is your wife Sarah?” And he said, “There, in the tent.” ¹⁰Then one said, “I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. ¹¹Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. ¹²So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?” ¹³The LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ ¹⁴Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.” ¹⁵But Sarah denied, saying, “I did not laugh”; for she was afraid. He said, “Oh yes, you did laugh.”

May your Word fall into our hearts this day, O God, as breath filling us with life, and as water softening the dry ground. Amen.

According to Genesis 12, Abraham (known then as Abram) was 75 years old when God called him to leave his country, his kindred and father’s house to go to a land that God would show him. And God made a promise to Abram that he would become the father of a great nation, God would bless him and make his name great, and he would become a blessing to all the families of the earth.

In Genesis 15 God repeated the promise to Abram, who was concerned that he remained childless. Yet God promised him a multitude of descendants comparing them to the number of stars in the sky.

In Genesis 17, Abram was 99 years old, and still childless. It was then that the Lord appeared to Abram to make a covenant with him, and again God promised to make Abram “exceedingly numerous,” and the ancestor of “a multitude of nations.” God also gave Abram a new name; Abraham. His wife, Sarai, became, Sarah. It was at this

point that Abraham laughed at the thought of he and Sarah actually having a child in their old age. Still, God repeated the promise and gave the child-to-be a name, Isaac, (which means *he laughs*). Our passage for today, then, is the fourth time God speaks of the promise to Abraham.

Abraham was sitting at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He didn’t see them coming. He happened to look up, and there they were; three men standing not far off. We can imagine Abraham wondering where they had come from. *We know*, because the narrator has told us; it was an appearance of the Lord.

“In the heat of the day,” in a desert climate, one could wonder if Abraham was hallucinating, or having a vision. It is the perfect set up for an encounter with God, and it reminds me of the Samaritan woman who came to draw water at noon – *in the heat of the day* – she too encountered God in the person of Jesus.

In any event, Abraham responded appropriately by immediately offering hospitality, which was the cultural expectation in Abraham’s time. Indeed, Abraham’s haste accents the importance of providing for visitors. Spiritually speaking, visitors are gift bearers. The gift may be material, but the visitor also bears the presence of God. Abraham seems to know this as he hastily prepares a feast for his guests.

This encounter between Abraham and the 3 “men” reminds me of the “appearance” story in Luke 24 where Jesus joined two of his followers on the road as they were walking to Emmaus. The two did not recognize Jesus as they walked along together. It was only after they offered hospitality that Jesus revealed himself in the breaking of the bread.

Here too, Abraham urged the 3 men to stay and he served them, and because he did, he received a gift; in this case it was God’s promise of a son. This time it was Sarah who laughed at the thought of it. The thought of her conceiving a child at 90 was just too absurd, and yet it was the thing she wanted most...all her adult life.

This is a story about God's promises that are far better and more abundant than we can imagine, or deserve. It is a story about Abraham and Sarah living between God's *promise* and *fulfillment*. And the question that now runs through my mind is: how do we live our lives today in that same place; between promise and fulfillment?

This question naturally leads us to ask another: what *is* the promise for us today? And what does fulfillment mean in the context of that promise?

For Abraham and Sarah, the promise was a son who would become the father of many nations. Who knows, perhaps some of us represent the fulfillment of that promise; perhaps some of us are descendents of Abraham and Sarah through Isaac!

What is *our* promise? As Christians, we turn to the promises Jesus made and hear his words; *I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly* (John 10:9-10).

Jesus promises us life; life in abundance. How should we respond to that promise?

Living between promise and fulfillment, Abraham served; he served 3 strangers, and received assurances of God's promise, soon to be fulfilled. And could we not say that the promise of offspring through Abraham and Sarah is still being fulfilled.

Like Abraham and Sarah, we are living between promise and fulfillment as well; every day! Jesus promises us life in abundance, and as we experience that life each day could we not say that we have already at least tasted the fulfillment of God's promises in Jesus Christ? Could it be that the fulfillment of God's promises an on-going process; a daily experience?

Yesterday I heard a man relate a story about his father on National Public Radio. As he was speaking with those who attended his father's funeral he discovered something he had not known about his father. One of his father's co-workers told him that his father helped

him financially through a very rough time, and no one else knew about it. From another, he heard a similar story. Again no one else knew.

We are called to serve one another; it might be a meal, it might be our loving presence for a home-bound neighbor, it might be a loan, a gift, or a ride to the doctor. By God's grace, our service is transformed into an experience of God's presence, and as such a gift of life for the other, perhaps even an experience of the abundance of life.

Living between promise and fulfillment we are invited to serve the guest who comes. This is how God visits us; this is how God conveys the promise of new life. Will we welcome God who has come to us today in the guise of a stranger? Will we hear the word of life that is spoken? God surely comes to us; God is surely present. May we open our hearts and our hands! Amen.