

I remember when I was pregnant with Sam our 2nd son, we told Ben & Ellie that this would be our last baby. Ben very quickly asked us, what if God was not done with our family yet. We gave him answer after answer. We put him off over and over again, finally telling him to talk to us after Sam turned 1. Sure enough, on Sam's first birthday, after moving to a new apartment, Ben asked the question. I remember telling him, I just couldn't do it. Fast forward 15 months later, when we told the kids that we were expecting baby #4, Ben yelled, I told you that God was not done with our family. I was like Sarah, I could not fathom, imagine or hold on to the idea of another child. I had every excuse in the book and the biggest one of all was that I was too tired and there was no way I could have another baby. You've all met Tim and know that God found a way.

I often think back to the scary days early in my pregnancy. I worried that I would not love this baby as much, or that I couldn't handle it. Never in my wildest dreams did I think this baby would so wonderfully upend our lives. We grew so much as a family. I grew so much as a mother, a wife and a pastor that I cannot imagine my life without Tim. I identify with Sarah so very much. The questions, the worry, the flat out laughter at such a preposterous idea. And yet, like me, we know that Sarah indeed have a child.

Many people take issue with Sarah's laughter, and even more so, her lie when she is called on her laughter. But we know that Abraham did it first, not just disbelief God but laugh at the notion – in chapter 17: 17. We could ask why didn't Abraham tell Sarah what God had told him. Clearly, he told her part of the story because her name is changed and Abraham, as well as all other men, were circumcised that day – something every one would have known. I wonder if Abraham not sharing the news with Sarah speaks to just preposterous he finds the promise in the first place. We all do. How many of us would laugh if one of our senior members announced they were expecting a child. We would probably not just laugh but try to explain away how that might even happen.

Chapter 17 gives Abraham, not just the promise of another son, but the promised covenant that encompasses land generations to come. Now we turn to chapter 18 for the next part of the story we do not know how much time has passed but Abraham and Sarah are at home in the middle of the day. When he looks up he sees 3 men standing near him and Abraham runs to them to offer them hospitality. Gone are the days, if we ever really had them, when we see strangers and rush to make sure their needs are taken care of. Experience has taught us to be weary of strangers – we do not know what danger they bring with

them. In order for us to get to the heart of this story, we have to let go of what we do now. Abraham, running to meet them, was the expectation in the time. Hospitality dictated that when you saw someone, you did the following things: see, run to meet, honor, invite, refresh, prepare and serve. These don't seem out of the ordinary for us – especially when we think of long hoped for visits from family and friends. In the days before the coronavirus, when we hear of someone who will be in the area, don't many of us do all that we can to welcome & celebrate the gift of time?

When I was a child growing up in Escondido I did not have biological extended family near by. My Dad's family was all in Georgia. When we would get a phone call that my Aunt & Uncle would be visiting, the house turned upside down cleaning, preparing and planning for the visit. I know that our children will run out to greet whoever is coming to visit, even if it's someone they've seen recently. They are excited to have guests.

As children of God, hospitality is at the forefront of who we are and how God calls us to act. I think of how we welcome people for Vacation Bible School, Hanging of the Greens and even a regular Sunday service. We get to know them, help them to feel comfortable, and make space for them within our Faith family. I watched you do that when you welcomed me as the pastor and I continue to watch you welcome guests that come to join us on

Sunday mornings. It is in our nature to be welcoming at church. And as we are meeting in many different locations at this time, how do we begin to embody a sense of hospitality when we are keeping physical distance?

I've been thinking a lot about how we practice our faith when we are not around others to show the love of God through actions. How might we extend hospitable practices now – in the age of coronavirus? The first thing we can do is to honor the physical space that we need to help protect each other. The longer this goes on the harder it becomes to not reach out and physically be near each other, especially those whom we love and miss. The second thing we can do is be kind to each other. How do we do this, by giving people the benefit of the doubt. By acknowledging that this is a new virus. We do not have all the answers when we would like them and gracious allowing others to change their minds when new information comes to light. When people make a different decision, honoring the decision, even if it's different from what we would do. Recently on Facebook, there has been a graphic shown with 3 different scenarios regarding decisions for educating our children. The first one says they are sending their children back to school. The response is: I know it wasn't an easy decision to make, I support you. When someone says, they're doing remote learning. I know that wasn't an easy decision to

make, I support you. When someone says they're homeschooling. I know that wasn't an easy decision to make, I support you. The third thing we can do is advocate for those who do not have a choice. How do we hold our public officials accountable? We need to ask our teachers if they feel comfortable with the precautions that are put in place. If they don't, we need to speak up. They know far better than most of us what children will and will not do. We also need to ask if they have the support they need. We need to ask what happens to our teachers if they get infected while teaching. Do they have enough paid sick leave? We cannot rely on what we've always provided because we're not dealing with what we're used to. Finally, we can pray deeply and dearly. We can pray for wisdom as our leaders make decisions. We can pray for peace for parents as they make difficult decisions and students as they begin the school year. We can pray for strength for our teachers & staff as they begin teaching in ways they were not trained to do. We can pray for each of us to have a spirit of compassion & hospitality as we figure out how to support each other.

I wonder how Sarah would have reacted if Abraham had been the one to tell her before hearing it from strangers? We don't know. But I know that I take news from people I trust better than from strangers. I also take comfort in know that Abraham &

Sarah found a way, not just to live, but thrive in difficult and trying times. They may have laughed initially, but in the end they lived. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.