

# Christ Church New Southgate & Friern Barnet

## 18 June 2023

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*Song: Praise my soul the king of heaven*

*Song: Give thanks, forever*

*Reading: Genesis 18.1-15 read by Roger Oram*

The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day.<sup>2</sup> Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

<sup>3</sup>He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord,<sup>[a]</sup> do not pass your servant by. <sup>4</sup>Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. <sup>5</sup>Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say."

<sup>6</sup>So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs<sup>[b]</sup> of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread."

<sup>7</sup>Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. <sup>8</sup>He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.

<sup>9</sup>"Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him.

"There, in the tent," he said.

<sup>10</sup>Then one of them said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son."

Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. <sup>11</sup>Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. <sup>12</sup>So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?"

<sup>13</sup>Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I

am old?' <sup>14</sup>Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son."

<sup>15</sup>Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh."

But he said, "Yes, you did laugh."

*Song: Nothing's too big (COLLECTION)*

*Gifts for Father's Day distributed.*

*Song: Freely*

*Prayers on Father's' Day led by Aarv and Gurpreet*

Loving God,  
We thank you for the gift of good dads,  
and everything that they do for us.  
Please help them to have  
patience when we're difficult,  
wisdom when we can't see the way,  
strength when we need help,  
and love at all times,  
so that, though them,  
we can see how you feel about us,  
our heavenly Father  
**Amen.**

Heavenly Father,  
you gave your Son Jesus,  
the child of Mary,  
to the care of Joseph, an earthly father.  
Bless all fathers  
as they care for their families.  
Give them strength and wisdom,  
kindness and patience;  
support them in the work they have to do,  
protecting those who look to them,  
as we look to you for love and salvation,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

*Sermon: The God who comes to us*

Do you know the children's story: *The Tiger Who Came to Tea?* The tiger who came to tea was a stranger to a young girl named Sophie, but she invited him into her home anyway. The tiger ate all the sandwiches, all the buns, all the biscuits, all the milk, all the tea, all the supper, all the food in the fridge and drank all the orange juice, all daddy's beer and even all the water in the tap. In the story Sophie's mother panics running around looking after and cleaning up after the tiger. He did make a lot of mess.

It is three strangers that suddenly appear at Abraham and Sarah's home too. At the presence of the men, Abraham panics right away, v2 in the middle of the hottest part of the day, he hurries to meet the visitors. v3&5 He offers to serve the men by washing their feet and preparing food for them himself. v5 You have come to your servant. He then really starts running, v6 he hurries to the tent to Sarah and runs to the herd v7. In his panic he gets Sarah baking – quick! Bake the best bread you can. He gets his servant to hurry getting the most tender meat ready too. He then empties the cupboards pulling out cream, milk, the meat and bread and he serves the visitors himself.

Hospitality was an important part of life in the time of Abraham. Travellers often had to stop at local homes for refreshment, and Abraham's actions are entirely honourable and lavishly generous. But his actions stand in stark contrast to Sarah. Sarah is baking bread, quickly and she is then hidden from view in the tent. Again, at that time it might have been very normal for men and women to eat separately. Or it might have been that Sarah was shy or indeed doing the washing up.

But consider this: neither Sarah nor Abraham know who these three men are, and neither do we until v10 when we learn that they are prophetic, announcing the birth of miraculous child and v13 is when the story tells us that this is the Lord. And yet Sarah is calm, and she is listening.

It is to her that the word of the Lord calls, v9 where is Sarah? the visitors ask. The Lord comes to Sarah and brings his promise to her. He speaks loudly enough that Sarah can hear what he's saying, clearly enough for her to understand every word and prophetically enough for her to laugh and the audacity of God.

When you've yearned for good news all your life, when as a woman then – you're only worth was to produce a son, when you have had to give your servant to your husband that he might bear an heir with her instead, when all of the male household has been circumcised because of this promise, a promise that Abraham would be a father of a great nation. When that promise has forced your family into migration, and then when your husband is 99 years old, then the word of the lord comes. Would you laugh? Would you cry?

I once went to a wedding where the bride and groom giggled walking down the aisle, giggled in the first hymn, and all the way through their vows. They didn't find it funny; their emotions had got the better of them.

For when we listen to the lord speaking, when we hear his promise to us – it opens our souls to the purposes of God and his enormous love and power and grace. And when you hear God speaking like that, about a promise he has for you, when you thought all hope was lost – its either tears or laughing at the greatness of God.

As hiding places go, behind the door of a tent is silly, tent doors move, they flap in the wind. Tent doors are not soundproof, and God can see through any door anyway, for the lord has come to Sarah and wants to give a message to her. He gives it in a way that is tender and knowing, for that is who God is. He's the lord who knows our thoughts, he knows our deepest longing and how we really feel.

At some point Sarah comes out of the tent and talks to the lord face to face. I didn't laugh she said, yes you did he said. This is the Lord who visits Sarah at home, spends time in her presence, speaks prophetically into her life and fulfils the covenant promise of God to establish a great nation through Sarah and Abraham. He is also the god who is happy to playfully answer back. I didn't laugh, oh you did, I heard you, you so did. I'd like to think there was a rueful smile on the Lord that day.

This is the character of God, God will come and meet you where you are, and speak to you. The character of those who love the Lord is to wait for the lord to speak and then to listen. For like Mary mother of Jesus, as God calls us into participating in his life, he seeks out those faithful women and men who are waiting and able to listen to him. To Sarah, Isaac is born. This baby for Sarah is precious, but all the more so because he is a sign of the promise of God, a God who loves us, leads us and comes to us. May we listen to him.

*Song: Come to God's table*

*Communion*

God has made us a people  
**We have been shaped by God's will**

Jesus calls us together  
**We meet in Jesus' name**

The Spirit binds us together  
**And leads us into truth**

*Prayers for the world*

*Song: May the mind of Christ my saviour*

*Blessing*