



Hymn            *My Faith Looks Up to Thee (UMH 452)*

1. My faith looks up to thee,  
thou Lamb of Calvary,  
Savior divine!  
Now hear me while I pray,  
take all my guilt away,  
O let me from this day  
be wholly thine!
  
2. May thy rich grace impart  
strength to my fainting heart,  
my zeal inspire!  
As thou hast died for me,  
O may my love to thee  
pure, warm, and changeless be,  
a living fire!
  
3. While life's dark maze I tread,  
and griefs around me spread,  
be thou my guide;  
bid darkness turn to day,  
wipe sorrow's tears away,  
nor let me ever stray  
from thee aside.
  
4. When ends life's transient dream,  
when death's cold, sullen stream  
shall o'er me roll;  
blest Savior, then in love,  
fear and distrust remove;  
O bear me safe above,  
a ransomed soul!

Benediction

Go now in peace, but be prepared to laugh like Sarah. Go now in hope, and be ready for unexpected miracles. Go now in love, for the one who loves us goes with us. (*The Abingdon Worship Annual*, 134)

Response            *God Be With You till We Meet Again (UMH 673)*

God be with you till we meet again;  
by his counsels guide, uphold you,  
with his sheep securely fold you;  
God be with you till we meet again.

## Receiving God's Impossibilities

6/14/2020

### Genesis 18:1-15

The Lord has made covenant with Abraham. The LORD has promised Abraham offspring but that has not been fulfilled and Sarah is past child bearing stage. Sarah has given Abraham her slave Hagar, who bore a child, Ishmael so that Abraham would have an heir.

Now the LORD appears to Abraham, except Abraham doesn't know it is the LORD. He sees three men standing near him but he doesn't recognize that one is the LORD. Now I realize some may argue that Abraham recognizes the LORD as he says, "My lord" in verse 3. However, you may notice that lord there is in lowercase letters indicating that it is the word lord. But in Verse 1 the LORD is in all capital letters indicating that it is the divine name. So in verse 3 where lord is in lowercase letters, it is simply a human honorific that Abraham gives to the men, not a use of the divine name.

Even though Abraham did not recognize the LORD, he receives these three men, strangers, with what can only be described as extravagant hospitality. Though he says he is only going to bring a little bread and water for them, he asks Sarah to make cakes from the choice flour, not the cheap stuff. Oh, and not only little bitty cakes but big cakes using three measures of flour. Then he runs out to the herd and catches the best calf, butchers and cooks it. He also provides curds (yogurt) and milk. Instead of a little snack for them he gave a full-blown BBQ! And he waited on them.

Abraham received the LORD with extravagant hospitality. Abraham received these strangers with extravagant hospitality, not realizing that one of them was the LORD. Abraham received the LORD with openness and hospitality.

The men ask about Sarah who is sitting in the tent but within earshot. In the theater she would be an offstage character, one who may be waiting in the wings but not onstage at the moment. One of the men, presumably the LORD, tells Abraham that he will return in due season and Sarah shall have a son.

From the tent there is the sound of laughter. Sarah is laughing at the absurdity of that statement. She is old. She is no longer menstruating. Her time for bearing children has long passed. Why do you think I gave Hagar to him, so he could have the son I couldn't? Get real! You can't get water from a dry well. Sarah laughed at the word of the LORD for it seemed impossible.

The Lord replies to Sarah's laughter with the question, "Is anything too wonderful for the LORD?" (NRSV) The NIV renders it as, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" The Common English as "Is anything too difficult for the LORD?" Basically, the question asks, "Is anything impossible for the LORD?"

The Hebrew word, *pala*, expresses the actions of God, the LORD, that are beyond the bounds of human powers and expectations. It is the action of God that is impossible by our human comprehension. Sarah could not comprehend that she could bear a child at her age. It was impossible! But not by the LORD's powers.

It takes all the way to Chapter 21 but we see that the impossible did happen. "The LORD dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had promised. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time which God had spoken to him (vv, 1-2, NRSV)."

For the LORD it was not impossible for Sarah to bear a child in her old age even though she was passed child bearing stage. Even though her human condition was such that it was physically impossible for her to conceive a child, she did. Even though she laughed at the impossibility of the promise, the impossible promise happened.

The LORD's impossible promise happened for Abraham and Sarah. They did have a son and his descendants did form a great nation. As we read the biblical narrative, we see the impossible promises of God being fulfilled. Some were "good" like crossing the Red Sea. Others maybe not so good, like that the nation would be defeated and the people scattered. Or some that seem absurd, like that God would use a gentile outsider, Cyrus the Persian King, to restore the Holy City and Temple. Or the ultimate impossibility that God would sacrifice the Son on a Roman cross so humanity might be restored to God.

The LORD continues to work impossible acts that are beyond our human comprehension. Such as that there are no longer Jew or Gentile, Slave or Free. But we wonder if this is so, why is there so much racial conflict in our nation and world? Or if the LORD heals creation why are we in the midst of one of the worst pandemics in history?

Perhaps it is in how we receive the LORD and the LORD's acts. Do we greet the LORD's acts and promises with extravagant hospitality and openness as Abraham received the LORD, giving our choice flour and fatted calf? Or do we laugh as Sarah did?

In the seemingly impossibility of curtailing the virus that is decimating our nation and the world, the LORD says, "I have given Doctors and Scientists the skill and

knowledge to know how to curtail this virus, listen to them.” Then these Doctors and Scientists who have been given skills and knowledge by God say that to curtail this virus we need to wash our hands, wear masks, social distance, not gather in larger groups, go out only when necessary and maybe close businesses, even churches for a few months until we can develop the means to trace this virus and develop a vaccine. Do we laugh? A piece of cloth over my face, staying away from family and friends, not going shopping or out to eat, and not going to church as a means of curtailing this virus. Ha! How stupid! Impossible!

Or do we receive it with openness and hospitality? Yes, I can wear a mask. I can limit how much I go out. I can worship God in other ways than being at some building at 11:00 Sunday Morning. I will survive without seeing my friends and family for a while. Yeah, I may hurt financially if I close my business but I may save my life. Do we do what God’s messengers tell us to do so the impossible occurs, or do we laugh while more people get sick and die?

In the seemingly impossibility of there no longer being Black and White, Rich and Poor, Male and Female, Gay and Straight, in this time where there is so much division along so many lines, God says , “you all are my children- Black and White, Rich and Poor, Male and Female, Gay and Straight-and I love all of you. I made all of you in my image.” Do we laugh and say that is impossible? It will never happen. It is just some dream like Martin Luther King’s dream of a day when children are judged by the content of their character, not the color of their skin. It is some hippie fantasy like John Lennon’s song Imagine. We may imagine it but it will never happen.

Or do we receive this impossibility with openness and hospitality? Do we open ourselves up to the LORD’s power to change our hearts and minds so we may be open to understand that the experience of some people is not the same as others? To admit to a history in which some people’s lives did not matter as much as others because of the color of their skin? Do we receive with openness and hospitality the power of the LORD to open our eyes, to take off the blinders that only let us see color and see all people as God’s Children, not black, not white, not male, not female, not gay, not straight, but God’s beloved Child?

The LORD has done impossible things. The LORD is doing impossible things. The Lord will continue to do impossible things. Do we laugh at the impossibility that is beyond our comprehension, or do we receive the impossibilities of the LORD with openness and hospitality, so we may participate in making the impossible, possible?

As followers of Jesus who participated fully in The LORD's impossible means of restoring humanity, let us receive The LORD's impossibilities with openness so we may participate as Jesus did in making the impossible, possible.



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pastor

June 11, 2020

Dear Trinity Family,

The worship committee has been working hard to establish a way in which we can restart in-person worship. Over the next few days you will receive a call from one of us to let you know what we have done and to get your feeling on returning to in-person worship.

We welcome any concerns and suggestions you may have regarding this. Please be honest when we call. We continue to monitor the number of new cases, which unfortunately has continued to rise, as we make the decision to restart.

Please continue to keep us in prayer and please give your honest feedback.

Shalom,

Pastor John