

Proper 6A-26 Sermon
June 14, 2026
Trinity Episcopal Church
The Rev. Sarah D. Thomas

“I did not laugh,” Sarah said. “Oh yes, you did laugh”, said God.

Can you recall a time in your life when you laughed in the face of something so absurd or impossible that it was hilarious to you? That is what happens to Sarah in today’s story from Genesis. She overhears a conversation taking place between her husband Abraham and three visitors who have arrived at their tent. It is the story depicted on our very own Trinity banner where you see the three visitors.

In the story, we find out that the three visitors are actually, mysteriously, messengers from God or angels or even God, who tell Abraham that Sarah will bear a son, even though she is 90 years old. And overhearing this, Sarah bursts into laughter. Because she has heard this before – 25 years ago, in fact, when she was 65 years old. God promised her that one day she would bear a son and through that son would come many generations through which the world would receive much blessing. But even at 65 that seemed impossible. And now, at 90, well ... just no. It is so absurd, and there has been so much waiting for this promise to come to pass, that she can’t help but laugh.

According to Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann, Abraham and Sarah have become accustomed to their hopelessness. So much time has passed and so much hardship has taken place since God’s first promise of a son, that they have accepted their hopelessness as normal. So normal, that God’s reiterating the promise to Abraham these many years later, is so bad it’s funny to Sarah. And into that laughter, God says, “Why did Sarah laugh? Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?”

When you think about it, this question (“Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?”) is all over the Bible. It’s like God has to keep asking us and showing us over and over again. Brueggemann says “it is [also] the fundamental question that each of us must answer.” “Is anything too wonderful or too hard for God?” This question is echoed in the story of the Annunciation in Luke’s Gospel when the angel visits Mary and tells her that she will bear a son who will be God incarnate, and the angel says, “For nothing is impossible with God.”

These stories don’t promise, however, that God will remove suffering or hardship. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus himself prays, pleads, that God will remove the cup of his impending suffering. But God does not remove the cup. So often we experience suffering and interpret it as a lack of God’s presence or intervention. But, as Brueggemann puts it, “Everything is possible for those who stay through the dark night of barrenness with God.” And sometimes, it is a very long wait. *Is anything too wonderful for God? Even in the barren desert landscape of suffering and waiting?*

Last summer, the interviewer Krista Tippett hosted Joy Harjo on her “Onbeing” podcast. Joy Harjo is a former poet laureate of the United States, and an indigenous woman – a member of

the Muscogee (Muh-Scoe-Ghee) Creek Nation. Her ancestors ended up in Tulsa, OK, which was at the end of the Trail of Tears. They had been forcibly and violently removed from their homelands in the deep south. Her family taught her a sense of space and time that is much vaster than how we tend to think about time. She calls it “the whole of time.” Her elders taught her that justice eventually comes to pass, even if “justice is sometimes seven generations away or even more.” Listening to this I thought, seven generations! That is a long wait for justice, especially in the face of the suffering her people and her ancestors have endured. Seven generations. That’s a lot longer than Abraham and Sarah had to wait for an heir. But if you count how long it took from God’s promise to God’s people finally arriving in the promised land, it was about 475 years. Abraham and Sarah did not live to see that. God’s time is long.

Krista Tippett says that thinking of time this way, is reminiscent of Einstein, who taught that “time is not an arrow moving forward, but relative. Not fixed. Not a compartmentalized past, present, and future. They are all happening and interacting with each other all the time. We experience this in our thoughts, in our hearts, and in our lives,” Tippett says, “but the modern world is structured differently. We live in a Newtonian world of calendars and deadlines and clocks.” The sense of time we get in the Bible and in Einstein and in Indigenous cultures is more cyclical and generational.

To get a sense of this, Tippett invites us into a thought exercise she calls “the 200-year-present.” Let’s do it together: Take your mind back to the youngest age you can remember and the oldest person you can remember holding you. Now roughly calculate the year of their birth and the history that shaped their lifetime. Now, think of the youngest person you have held in your arms most recently, and the year to which they might live. The span of time you will be able to calculate from this, is going to be roughly 200 years. Tippett calls this your 200-year-present that your life on this earth spans, that you have literally touched and been touched by. Tippett suggests that this exercise can stretch our sense of the possibilities of the imprint and agency of our span on earth. Think of all the ways the world has changed and will change between the birthdate of that elder who held you and the life span of the youngest one you held in your arms. You touch all that time – you are connected to all it. Tippett says, “It doesn’t make what we stand before easier, “but it absolutely makes it more spacious.” She says this helps us “practice knowing in our bodies and our minds, time as a more generative canvas and companion on which we carry and confront and inhabit and work with the hardness and the sacredness of what we have before us.”

God, visiting with Abraham and Sarah in their tent under the oaks, is doing just that – inviting them into a more spacious imagination of what God is promising and what time will hold if they keep their faith in that God-time perspective. It brings to mind that famous quote attributed to Martin Luther King Jr.: “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” As Tippett puts it, this is “to believe and to insist and to live as if time and space are on the side of deep justice and human flourishing in which we all become more whole.” Perhaps, with this in mind, we can keep up the good fight toward a better world.

When I think of my 200-year-present, when I think of the stories of my life and of those I bear witness to, I realize that you never know when a story is over. Sometimes it takes years for a story to reach its culmination or for healing to take place. Sometimes we think a story is over,

only to find it resurrected years later. Like Sarah in the tent under the oaks when three mysterious visitors arrive and ask for hospitality, little did she know they came bearing a divine message and it surprised her so much she burst into laughter. You never know when a story picks up where you thought there was a dead-end.

Sarah's laughter betrays her lack of trust in this sense of time and justice and God's ultimate provision. "I did not laugh," she says. But God responds, "Oh yes, you did laugh." God catches her in the act of laughter, in the act of disbelief, and instead of scolding her for her lack of faith, God seems amused. And God even tells her to name the son who is to be eventually born, Isaac, which means "laughter." God understands that we are creatures of limitation and that it can be funny how short-sighted and impatient we are. Laughter gets to be part of it all. "Is anything too wonderful for God?" God asks.

This question, ultimately, is about resurrection, isn't it? Will we dare to believe that life actually comes out of *death*? That love *will win*? That death and injustice and suffering will never have the last word? In our time-bound existence of clocks and calendars and deadlines, it is hard to answer these questions with a yes. But isn't that what resurrection asks of us?

One of the ways we are brought back into this spacious sense of God-time, whole time, is in our weekly celebration of the Eucharist. Intentionally written into our Eucharistic Prayer are words that remind us that we are part of that much longer, more spacious reality of time. At the altar, at the table, we remember our ancestors in the faith who God delivered out of slavery in Egypt, we remember our ancestors who sat with Jesus at the last supper and heard the words of that very first Eucharist when he broke the bread and poured the wine, and we are simultaneously celebrating the feast-to-come when we will break bread around God's table with Christ once again and with all those who came before and who will come after us. It is a prayer that transcends time and space, and draws us fully into the mystical Body of Christ that holds all of time all at once.

So when you come forward this morning to receive the bread and the wine, let it be for you food for the journey of faith – food for the long view and the long work and the long arc of justice and provision and peace and shalom – food that connects you with your ancestors and with the children that are yet to be born. And if it makes you laugh at the absurd-yet-miraculous notion of it all, that's ok, too. God will smile. Is anything too wonderful for God?