

Sermon Text for September 20, 2015

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Matthew 17: Genesis 18:1-15

“Getting our ratio right”

I was so proud of First Presbyterian yesterday. A number of us participated in the Big Steps for Little People 5k run/walk and we represented really well. Before the event started a 33 year old woman who had dwarfism gave a talk about her journey with the disease and how she has been able to live her life without always focusing on her size. It so reminded me of how extraordinary things can really come in small packages and how we often assume that the size of a person often dictates the value of the person. We often get our ratio wrong. Here is a clip of someone whose size often fooled those who saw him and thought he wasn't very significant. Yoda is a great example. We also have the very iconic image of the tip of the ice berg where we know that what we see does not represent what is present. We often get our ratio wrong in regards to what we see and what is really present.

Our Scripture today asks us one question that all of us need to keep in our minds when we think on the topic of getting our ratio right. The question is: are we able to maintain a holy balance in the ratio of our pursuit of personal comfort and conveniences and the commitment of God's loving calling in our lives. We have seen that the two are often at odds with each other. Getting our ratio right is really what it is all about. This question arises from our Scripture in Genesis 18:1-15.

Poor Sarah. It is her again. And again she is depicted not in the most flattering light. It seems to be her character in Scripture that she just isn't able to shake. We've been looking at Genesis now for a long time. It seems that from the beginning of this book we are sitting on the edge of our seats waiting and wondering if God is going to answer God's promises. God promises to bless Adam and Eve and all they have to do is be fruitful and multiply but then they find that their ratio of the pursuit of comfort and conveniences is far stronger than their commitment of God's call in their lives. They sin and pursue pleasure, but God doesn't desert them. The same is the case with the tower of Babel. Again the ratio of our pursuit of personal pleasure and pride and our commitment to God's call in our lives is tilted dramatically toward selfish pride. But God stays with us. With Noah we see how evil humanity has become and we wonder how in the world is God going to bless them and we see the rainbow and we are reminded again of God's faithfulness.

This morning with Abraham we approach the passage knowing that from the beginning of his journey in Haran God had promised him two things: 1) land so vast that

it would far outstretch anything he could see, and 2) that he will have descendants more than the stars. We've been sitting on the edge of our seats waiting for these promises to come true, but we get the feeling that Abraham and Sarah have very nearly given up because so much time has passed and they have received no answer. Especially after last week when Abraham falls on his face laughing. Look at vs. 17 in chapter 17. Now it's Sarah's turn. In our Scripture today the promises of God, the good news of the Gospel has become old news to Abraham and Sarah. They are tired of waiting.

How different are we from these characters in the Bible? Time and time again we read the Gospel and we hear the promises of God and yet we aren't sitting on the edge of our seats waiting for them to come true, but rather we skip right over them because, well if God says we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us, he doesn't really mean it does he? When was the last time we actually not only believed in God but believed God when he states I will not leave you or forsake you. How about when he states I will provide what you need so don't be weary or anxious.

We don't believe God's promises because our ratio is off. We would rather actually pursue the things that we can immediately see and feel and smell and touch, the material things of this world, than give our all, our 100% to God. Our belief and faith ratio is way off. Well this is where Abraham and Sarah are, two elderly people in their 90's not real convinced that God's word is going to come true.

This story is so typical of most Bible stories. It begins with a situation, then it gives you a complication and then finally you get a solution. Well the situation is we find Abraham sleeping, taking his afternoon nap by the entrance of his tent. When you're almost 100 you are allowed to take afternoon naps. You see no longer does he have that excitement and encouragement which comes after we experience God. He had just talked to God face to face. I think I'd be awake for the next month to not miss the next encounter.

You know how it is, you have a strong religious experience and then over time the world crowds out the emotion and you start to wonder if God ever did promise anything to you after all. The situation is that the Lord disguised as three men, the orthodox church call this the appearance of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in fact whenever you see in the churches a depiction of Abraham hosting three men under the oak of Mamre you are to assume that you are witnessing a depiction of the Holy Spirit. Abraham is serving God in disguise and he does a good job of it as he rushes around getting everything prepared.

The situation becomes more intense in vs. 9 as one of them states: Where's Sarah? Abraham responds: in the tent. Then the man says something that all of a sudden turns the situation into a complication: Sarah is to have a child. Scripture tells us that her

biological clock had already run out, she was nearly 100. She does what anyone who has stopped believing in God's promises and started to focus upon pursuing their own comforts and conveniences and have forgotten their commitment to God's loving call in our lives, she laughs. Every time our ratio is skewed away from God we are hiding in the corner of our house laughing at God's promises and relying on the world's lies. Little did she know that she was laughing in the face of God.

The complication following the situation was that Sarah laughed at God's promises. And that's not the worst of it, God caught her laughing and then she complicates the complication by denying it. **"I did not laugh at that man's statement"** Oh yes but you did laugh.

How many times do we catch ourselves laughing at God's promises. How many times do we find ourselves caught off guard by an unexpected response to our prayers? The complications arise in our lives, like it did in Sarah's when we are asked the question: "Is anything too wonderful for God?" Vs. 14 should be our memory verse for the decade here at FPC. "Is anything too wonderful for God?" This is the question that we are asked, each of us as we face the harsh and bitter realities of this world. Is anything too wonderful for God. But be careful and take your time because how we answer that one single question determines everything about us. It will determine our relationship with God, it will determine our ratio of how much we pursue our own personal comforts and conveniences and our commitment to God's faithful calling in our lives.

Is anything too wonderful for God? What we are really asking is: is God God? The Gospel requires an answer for us. If we say yes, some things are too wonderful, too difficult, well then we don't believe in the power and radical freedom of God.

How do we get people to put their commitment to God first and their commitment to their pleasures and comforts last? This is the question of our age and it is a question that we all struggle with especially in a country that is the richest in the world. 10,000 refugees from the Syrian crisis is all we can handle? Really. As a church that takes in nearly half a million dollars a year we try to keep our ratio right by reaching out to the poor and powerless around us, but our ratio is never right. As extraordinary as this church is, we can always do better. That is how we try to make sure that our ratio is right. But as individuals it is extremely challenging because how much is too much and how little is too little?

We are trained to live our lives as a pursuit of happiness as our Declaration of Independence tells us, and so as a result personal comfort takes precedent over all other things. What do people strive for today? To be successful, not necessarily spiritual. To be popular and not necessarily humble, to be liked, and not necessarily to be loved with an agape kind of love that can only come from God. Our ratio of our commitment to

Christ and our pursuit of comfort and conveniences is off.

Abraham and Sarah had settled in with their situation, a radical change in their lives wasn't what they wanted or expected. So when God tells them that God will provide, they laugh.

You can be sure that whenever the storms come in life, somebody is laughing in the face of the Lord and their ratio is skewed. Look around you in the world and in this country today. Somebody is laughing in the face of God, somebody right here and now is laughing. If not then things would be different. God has given us a mission to ensure that our ratio between personal pursuit of pleasure and conveniences and the commitment of God's loving call in our lives is not skewed. But somebody has laughed in the face of God because when I look around me I see injustice. Somebody has fallen asleep in this country where policemen are killed on the streets and people of color aren't safe from the very authorities who are supposed to be protecting them. Who is it? Who is laughing in the face of God as we are so in tune with a three house debate but would never dream of spending 30 minutes trying to find a solution to the housing problem in this county. Who is it? Who is laughing in the face of God when as Christians we are called to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the poor and yet here we are a little bitty church in Strasburg doing the work that ought to be done by others. Who is it? Who is it that laughs while God promises us something far better than what we presently have. Can you imagine what we could do if the ratio of our community was changed from a pursuit of pleasure to a priority of serving the poor? Who is that pursues personal pleasure and yet disregards God's calling on our lives?

It's a me, it's a me, it's a me Oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer. If we took seriously God's claim on our lives and the promises made to us that we find in Scripture then at 9:31, or 12:01 when we get out of church today, the world should be transformed. Jesus tells his disciples when they ask him why were we powerless against the forces of this world he tells them because of our little faith. If you have the faith of a mustard seed you will move mountains, nothing will be impossible for you.

Or as we read in Genesis, is anything too wonderful for God? I don't think so, but unless those who have their ratio right band together, if we are able to work together so that justice will roll down like waters then all things will be possible. Do you believe it? It is time to get the ratio right, it is time to place God's interests and desires in our lives ahead of our pursuit of pleasure. It is time to start believing and stop laughing at God's wonderful promises that will allow us to transform this world. Amen.