

Genesis 18

Sisters and brothers!

Welcoming people can be a healing experience. Being made welcome can be a healing experience. Finding a place at a table as a stranger can be a healing experience. Being invited and served as if you were a family member can be a healing experience.

It can be so easy to heal, to comfort, to make people feel at home.

Sara and Abraham have been such welcoming and healing people. Abraham is zealous when the guests arrive. He is happy for someone to come, he gratefully fulfills his task as a house-father: he is hospitable, he takes care of the service: "Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on". Then he takes care of the strangers, gives orders to the wife and servants and finally they eat.

This means, after a couple of long hours they eat. There is no rush. The meal takes time to prepare and the hosts have time to spend with you making you feel comfortable and welcomed. Feeling at home also means: I am given time, as much as I need. I am not set under pressure. I don't have to hurry. If have time to arrive. My hosts are patient people. They are welcoming.

After some hours, the guests ask: "Where is your wife Sara?"

God comes not just to Abraham but to Sara too. God comes to promise a future to the old couple, to announce the fulfillment of their long-buried hopes. But Sarah laughs. She waits in the tent and listens; she is, if you set it negatively - "curious," if you set it positively, she is "interested". She wants to know what the strangers have to say and also what has led them to their home, what they want.

Sara hears: "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son." What she hears makes her laugh.

She laughs at the absurdity of what has been said. "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" Sara can only laugh derisively - and perhaps a little bitterly, too.

What is to be expected when you are old? It is not to believe that in old age you will give birth to new life.

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Sara has resigned herself, probably with some effort, to the fact that her life is lived, that nothing more is to come, that no next generation will take up her journey, that it was not her life's mission to be a mother.

Now she is in the years in which no one expects great things, in which people are preparing for the end of the road. No, there is nothing more to come. There is nothing more to expect. Just a little bit of everyday life, which is getting more and more tiring day by day: The eyes are not the same as 50 years ago; the hands are not, nor are the ears or the legs. Everything goes more slowly ... She is resigned to growing older without offspring and drawing ever closer to the end of her life.

And now: Sara laughs bitterly as these guests open up old wounds.

You don't have to be old yourself to get close to Sara.

How often do we think or live according to the inner motto: Nothing more will come. Everything is settled, the procedures are sorted, plans are made, ideas and longings from the past are happily buried. We strive for a settled life where everything is in place and providing the daily necessities determines our lives.

Then something happens that may awaken old desires. Some long hidden or repressed past ambition comes to the fore. Would you believe that there could be new life outwith this old everyday life?

Do we then laugh like Sara? Bitterly, disbelievingly, derisively?
Would you believe it: New life out of this old everyday life?

Maybe Sara laughs not only bitterly, but also somehow wisely. Perhaps she laughs in the wisdom of age, because she knows how to distinguish the important from the unimportant; maybe she laughs wisely because she is able to accept things that cannot be changed.

Sara laughs, she laughs bitterly, unbelievably, and perhaps also calmly and wisely.

And then, when asked about her laughter, she denies having laughed. She denies because she is afraid. Could it be possible after all? Maybe she denies having laughed for fear of something new to come after all, when nothing more awaited her?

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Maybe she was afraid that this old hope for children might germinate again. This hope, which she had buried so painfully?

Anyway, there is something to smile and to laugh about when God promises something. God always believes that even the old ones, the desperate ones, or the tired ones still have something to offer.

Sara laughs. God makes her laugh again. It is a bright smile of happiness.

Sara experiences the fulfillment of God's promise.

She does not remain stubborn in her conviction that everything is too late anyway. The years that are to come are hers, with her child, with her husband. Sara, the old woman, has born a child.

It does not necessarily have to be the birth of a child, which will change our lives forever.

It can be the birth of hope, the birth of satisfaction, the birth of the courage and the confidence to expect something new. A chance to depart from the familiar path and start something new, something long buried. There is still something alive in us that wants to grow towards the light.

God has to offer the happiness of a new beginning, the promise of life before death!

Many a bitter and disbelieving laughter could slowly turn into a bright smile: on Sara's face and on our faces too. Maybe we just need to be more attentive when God's guests come knocking at our door, bringing a promise which is only meant for us and which we should grasp. Let us open the door, welcoming guests, strangers, friends, angels...welcoming God's future for us and with us. Let us lay our tables, offer something to eat and to drink and start the conversation about a new beginning.

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Sometimes it can be so easy to heal, to comfort, to make people feel at home, to become a host for God and his angels.

To be blessed and to be a blessing.

Amen