

St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Associate Rector Scripture: Genesis 18:1-14

"It's a Matter of Trust"

A tourist fell over a cliff and plunged down, clawing and scratching to save himself. On his way toward the bottom, he saw a scrubby bush which he desperately grabbed with both hands. Filled with terror, he called out toward heaven, "Is there anyone up there?" A calm, powerful voice came out of the sky, "Yes, there is." The tourist pleaded, "Can you help me? Can you help me?" The calm voice replied, "Yes, I can. What is your problem?" "I fell over the cliff and am dangling, holding onto a bush that is about to let go. Please help me!" "The voice from above said, "I'll try. Do you believe?" "Yes, yes, I believe." "Do you have faith?" "Yes, yes. I have strong faith." The calm voice said, "Well, in that case, simply let go of the bush and everything will turn out fine." There was a tense pause, then the tourist yelled, "**Is there anyone else up there?**"

How often do we keep looking for better answers when the ones we receive don't match up with our expectations? God is NOT a short order cook – or custom stylist – who asks us how we want things - and then makes it so. Sure there are choices in life – but when it comes to eternal life – there are only two – as Bishop Atwood says "**Smoking or non-smoking?**" We cannot make our life into a giant conditional "*If*" statement that lets us list how we want things or how we will accept things – *or else*.

Remember Abraham and Sarah – they were told by God to be patient and wait – and they would be rewarded with a son – on whom God's promises would be fulfilled. They grew impatient and called in a surrogate – Haggai – who gave birth to Ishmael. Yes, he was a son of Abraham – but NOT the "son of the Promise." Actions have consequences – and so Ishmael was born. Why is it that so many of us are guilty of trying to make God do things our way?

Our Old Testament lesson from Genesis 18 is where God speaks to us today. Abraham was an old man, 99 years old, and he was sitting in the shade, in front of his tent in *Mamre*, near Hebron, about 20 miles south of where Jerusalem would eventually be. It was a hot afternoon, and Abraham was taking a little snooze. When he looked up, he was surprised to see 3 visitors standing in front of him. He quickly jumped up and began to show them some hospitality, as is common in Bedouin culture. As these 3 visitors sat in the shade with Abraham, they asked him where his wife Sarah was.

Then one of the three spoke up. He was obviously the leader, and as he spoke, it became very clear to Abraham who this man really was. By the way this is an example of a Theophany– a visitation of God to earth – in the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ and two of His angels. In verse 10 Jesus says "*I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son.*" Remember, this was God Himself, speaking to Abraham, in human form, making a promise to Abraham, that a year from now, Abraham would be the father of a brand new baby boy. Keep in mind, Abraham was 99 years old, and his wife Sarah was 89. It is true that back then they did live a little longer that we do today, but not much longer. **Imagine a couple today in their middle 70's and this was the couple that was going to have a baby?** It seemed like an absurd promise. This Scripture tell us that they are both old and Sarah is beyond child bearing. Not even our modern-day fertility clinics would be able to help this couple. What God was promising here would seem to be virtually impossible.

Isn't that how God is? He likes to make promises that seem to be impossible to keep.

Throughout the Bible, Jesus promises that someday, He's going to end the world and return. That seems like a pretty amazing promise. But even more amazing - Jesus promises that on that day, when He returns, He's going to physically raise from the dead every single person in this world who has ever died. Now that's quite a promise! I am often asked: "what about those people who have been cremated?" Seems like it would be impossible, doesn't it? And just think of the sheer numbers. How in the world is Jesus going to raise all those people from the dead? But that's what He promises to do. Another pretty extreme promise in the Bible is when God promises you that "*God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*" (Romans 8:28) In every single thing that happens to you in your life, God promises you that He will work it out, whatever it is, for your good and the good of those who love Him. All it requires is for you to TRUST Him!

What did the 89-year-old Sarah do when she overheard God saying that she would be a mother? She laughed to herself "*After I have become old, shall I have pleasure?*" (Gen. 18:12) Sarah most certainly doubted and didn't think that God could do something like that. And you know what? There's a little bit of Sarah inside each one of us. When you suddenly have everything around you turn into "a pile of goo" – and you seem to be sinking fast – physically, emotionally and spiritually - and God says to you, "*I promise to work out all things for good*" – don't you sometimes have doubts? When a loved one dies, and at the funeral you are reminded that Jesus promises to someday raise your loved one from the dead – and you say goodbye to that loved one – it seems like an impossible promise that God is making. And that's when the Sarah inside each one of us pops up. We laugh to ourselves. We doubt. We say, "God can't do that. Things don't work that way."

My brothers and sisters - God can do the impossible! He confirmed His promise by a personal visit—and ate with them—to announce that the time was at hand. It was the annunciation of a humanly impossible birth. When something as incredible as this is declared, the human response is consistent: like Sarah, people are taken off guard and they laugh, and deny that they laugh out of fear (18:15). But God truly knows human hearts and that Christians often are taken back at what He says He can do. Remember – it is God who spoke the universe into existence with merely a word. **Is a child from a dead womb too amazing for the One who spoke all things into existence?** It is no laughing matter. He can do it. Nothing is too incredible for those in relationship with the Lord because there is nothing that is too difficult for Him. **It's a matter of Trust!**

The promised birth of *Isaac* is linked with laughter. In fact, the name "*Isaac*" means "*laughter.*" Abraham had laughed in joyful faith when he received the news that God would give him a son in Genesis 17:15–18, but here Sarah seems to laugh in **physical disbelief**. Why should we doubt the promises of God? "*Is anything too difficult for the Lord?*" When the Angel Gabriel told Mary that she would have a Son, her faith is firm in Luke 1:34, when she inquired, "*How shall this be?*" On the other hand, Sarah was cynically laughing saying, "How can this be?" When Isaac was born, however, Sarah did laugh in spiritual joy at the fulfillment of the miracle of God's promise. (Genesis 21:6–7).

The Lord asked Abraham "*Is anything too difficult for the Lord?*" **The answer is No**, so let me ask you this:

- Why do we act as if there are things in our life that God cannot change? Why do we think that there are things that even God couldn't or wouldn't understand?

- Do you think that God won't understand your grief and so you keep it all bottled up inside? Remember God gave his Son and watched as **He was betrayed, beaten, and led to a horrible death!**
- Do you think that our Lord doesn't know what it is like to be tempted? According to the Gospels of Mark and Luke - Jesus was tempted for 40 days and nights – but in actuality – He was exposed to the temptations every single day of His human existence – but NEVER sinned!
- Do you think God doesn't know what it feels like to be lonely and alone? The Gospels tell us that Jesus had no place to lie His head, no home – but heaven, and He often took solace alone praying to His Father, which is what we should do when we feel alone, or lonely.
- Do you think our Lord doesn't know what it feels like to wrestle with wanting His way vs. wanting God's way? You only need to remember the Garden of Gethsemane and how Jesus sweat great drops of blood and said "*My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.*" (Matthew 26:39)
- Do you think that God couldn't possibly understand what it is like when you are falsely accused of something – Don't forget how He also was falsely accused by His enemies, and yet He didn't even open His mouth to vindicate Himself.

My point is this: **God can do anything and absolutely nothing is impossible for Him.** My dear friends, there is nothing that you are personally going through that God can't help you with, or that He wouldn't understand. **He is not some distant God waiting for you to mess up so He can point a stick at you and punish you!** He is a loving Heavenly Father, who sent His Son to die in your place. **He is a loving God who knows you, knows your heart, understands you and is waiting to help you.** All you need to do is to ask; Ask for His help, commit yourself to Him and trust that **"Nothing is too hard for Him."**

Holy Scripture is filled with wonderful, encouraging reminders of how much God wants to help us and how there is nothing He cannot or will not do. In the interest of time – here are just a few. **Let's begin with the Words of Jesus Himself.** In Mark 9:23 Jesus said "*All things are possible to him who believes.*" In Matthew 19:26 Jesus said to the crowds after explaining about the rich man, the camel and the eye of a needle that "*With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*"

The Apostle Paul – who himself was transformed by the Lord reminds us of who is our strength – in one of my favorite verses Philippians 4:13 "*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*"

The Prophet Jeremiah in chapter 32:17 proclaims "*Ah Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You*" God Himself speaks through Jeremiah in verse 27 of that chapter saying: "*Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?*"

- Maybe you've got a friend or a loved one that does not know Christ. You have tried to talk to them, you've invited them to church—maybe they even came once or twice - just to keep you from harping on them – but you have seen NO change in them. No matter how hard you try they seem to grow more indifferent, even angry at the invitation.

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- Maybe it's your children...you have tried your absolute best to raise them - and now they have gone down a path that is utterly breaking your heart. You've quoted Proverbs 22:6 so many times it isn't even funny and you have asked God, "What did I do wrong?" You want to give up on them...but the amazing love inside of you won't let go
- Maybe it's your marriage...you have tried everything and it looks like this is the week where you both are going to hit the proverbial wall and it is all going to fall apart. You see no signs of things turning around and are tempted to give up...

Please remember - NOTHING is impossible with God—NOTHING!!! Sometimes He brings us to the end of our rope so that we can fully rely on Him by seeing how limited we are and how unlimited He is. **It is a matter of Trust!**

So let me present you with this idea: You and I are walking and you say that you are very thirsty. We stop and I buy you a bottle of water. Are you now refreshed and not thirsty? The answer is No – if you never open the bottle! Just because the water is right in front of you doesn't make you less thirsty – you have to open it and take a drink – or nothing will ever satisfy your thirst. It's just that way with God's love. You have to trust Him and open your heart to Him – or you can never really know Him and you will never really be satisfied – eternally.

I would like to close today with a lyrical testimony to God's providence from an unknown author:

**“Lord, I have never moved a mountain and I guess I never will.
All the faith that I could muster would not move a small ant hill.
Yet, I will tell you, Lord, I am grateful for the joy of knowing Thee,
and for all the mountain moving, down through life you have done for me.
When I needed some help You lifted me from the depths of great despair.
And when burdens, pain and sorrow have been more than I can bear,
you have always been my courage to restore life's troubled sea,
and to move these little mountains that have looked so big to me.
Many times when I have had problems and when bills I have had to pay,
and the worries and the heartaches just kept mounting every day,
Lord, I do not know how you did it. I cannot explain the where's' or whys.
All I know is that I have seen these mountains turn to blessings in disguise.
No, I have never moved a mountain, for my faith is far too small.
Yet, I thank you, Lord of Heaven; you have always heard my call.
And as long as there are mountains in my life, I will have no fear,
for the mountain-moving Jesus is my strength and always near.”**