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St Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th St. SW
Austin, MN, 55912-1749

Pastor Ted Barthels
sermon preached on-
July 21, 2013
9th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Colossians 1:21-29; Luke 10:38-42

Hymns: 16; 366:1-4; 306:1-5; 309

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Genesis 18:1-14

Then the Lord appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. 2 So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, 3 and said, "My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. 4 Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. 5 And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant." They said, "Do as you have said."

6 So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes." 7 And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it. 8 So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate.

9 Then they said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” So he said, “Here, in the tent.” 10 And He said, “I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.” (Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.) 11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. 12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, “After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?”

13 And the Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?’ 14 Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God!

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed

INTRO: - Can you imagine your reaction?

Imagine if a stream of black cars pulled up to the curb in front of your house, and the President of the United States stepped out of one of those vehicles and approached your house? How would you respond? How would you receive the President, the man many regard as the most powerful man in the world, and the leader of the free world? I know that we are accustomed to making quick replies, like, “I would let him know a thing or two about how he should be doing his job!” In fact we would likely be very excited and very nervous, regardless if we are Democrat or Republican. It would indeed be a high honor for the President to visit you in your home.

In our text Abraham was surprised to see visitors suddenly appear and approach his camp. He had company, and with their sudden appearance he realized it wasn't just a chance encounter with a traveler. He was highly honored to have the Lord appear before him in the form of a man with two others also, those others being angels. Abraham had an unexpected guest appear

who was far greater than the President. The chances of the President of the United States coming to our homes is so remote, so slight that it is difficult for us to seriously entertain the thought. However, the chances of the Lord coming to our homes to be our guest, to be present with us, this is not remote at all. He who is far greater than any President, is also far more powerful and indeed the true leader of the free world, that is those who are spiritually free from sin and death. He is delighted to hear and grant our petition, **“Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest!”**

Now, if we were to have a dignitary come to our homes we would receive instruction about how we ought to behave, what conduct and conversation is considered proper and respectful for so great a guest. In our text we look to Abraham’s example at Lord’s visit to his home that we might be instructed from these events for -

Theme: Presenting A Proper Reception for the Lord.

On the first level we see how Abraham responded to the Lord on a material and social manner. We may learn from this concerning –

I. Welcoming the Lord into Our Homes and Lives.

As we read through the way Abraham reacted to the Lord’s sudden appearance at his home we can’t help but note the parallels with Martha’s response to Jesus’ visit to her home. Abraham graciously received the Lord. He humbled himself before the Lord and invited these travelers to be served by him. He offered water that they might wash their feet. He requested the honor of being allowed to serve the Lord and His companions a morsel of bread.

The Lord was gracious in accepting this service from Abraham. We might say Abraham went all out. He ran to get things prepared and called Sarah and his servants into action. They made a large amount of bread. Abraham called for almost a bushel of flour to be brought and made into bread! Abraham

found a choice animal, a tender and young calf to prepare and present to the Lord.

There is much for us to learn from Abraham's example regarding how we should welcome the Lord's presence into our lives. We are to be humbly at His service. He has blessed us in so many ways. He has blessed us with gifts and abilities. He has blessed us with abundant material goods for which we should always be thankful, which we eagerly bring back into His service.

And yet the Lord has done something even more marvelous, He has brought His presence into my life. He has promised to be near, and never to forsake me. He has promised to be with me even to the end of the age, and that is true wherever I might be. God is faithful and watches over me in all my ways. He is Lord of my life. As such He is my protector, my Defender, my Redeemer. As my Lord, He directs me in the right paths, the paths of righteousness for His name sake. He invites me to serve Him, and that I will do with the best of my ability and the best of what He has given me.

We should be eager and willing to bring our best to the Lord. It is our reasonable service. Oh, yes, one might rationalize that the Lord doesn't need anything from me. After all, the Lord, He is God. He has made all things and can provide for all apart from me, and indeed He does provide for all, including me. However, we in turn seek opportunities to demonstrate our appreciation for His grace and favor.

Surely this gives us direction in offerings to the Lord here at church. He doesn't deserve our leftovers. He desires our first-fruits. But that is only the beginning. Abraham was acknowledging the Lord's presence in his life, and served Him in his home. We need to remember to do that as well. The Lord is to be a welcome guest in our homes, and we should serve Him in all that we do, and in all that we say.

But there is more to this event than the Lord dropping by for a bite to eat! The Lord had a purpose in coming to visit with

Abraham that day, He had something to tell Abraham and Sarah. The events of that day instruct us in -

II. Honoring the Lord by Our Reception of His Word.

It was at this point that the Lord revealed the purpose of His appearance. It was to deliver a very significant piece of news in the lives of Abraham and Sarah. They were to have a son born to them in their old age, born to them in the coming year, “**according to the time of life.**” Abraham already had a son by Sarah’s maidservant, Hagar. Ishmael was already a strapping lad of thirteen years of age. But the Lord had made it clear to Abraham earlier that same year that this was not the son of the promise. Earlier that year the Lord had appeared to Abram and given him the name Abraham, which means “**father of many nations.**” The Lord also changed Sarai’s name to Sarah, for she was to be “**mother of many nations.**” When Abraham asked if Ishmael could be that son of the covenant because Abraham was going to be 100 years old in the next year and Sarah would 90 years old, the Lord made His will clear for all of them.

Genesis 17:19 Then God said: “No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him. 20 And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. 21 But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.” 22 Then He finished talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.

Now the Lord returned with His gracious presence, and with His powerful Word He assured Abraham that the promise was to be fulfilled “**according to the time of life,**” that is the gestation period for a human baby to be born.

Here is where we learn a lesson regarding hearing the Word of the Lord. The Lord asked where Sarah was before He spoke His Word of promise. Abraham assured the Lord that she was in the

tent. She was present where she could hear all that the Lord would say. The Lord said:

Genesis 18: 10- 12 Behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.” (Sarah was listening in the tent door which was behind him.) 11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; and Sarah had passed the age of childbearing. 12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, “After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?”

The Word of the Lord was clear. **Sarah** would have a son. In spite of her advanced years the promise of the Lord would be fulfilled. This was a great and important covenant promise for it would be through this son (and then Isaac’s special descendent) that **“all the nations of the earth would be blessed”** (Gen. 22:18). Isaac’s Seed would be Savior of the world.

Sarah, however, could not get past just how incredible, unbelievable, even ludicrous this promise of God was for them. They had been waiting for 25 years for this son to be born to them, and now she was well past the years of childbirth. God was still holding out to them the promise, even declaring its fulfillment imminent. It was beyond Sarah to believe this would still happen, that this could still happen. The Lord who knows all, even what is in our hearts, called Sarah on this moment of doubt!

Genesis 18:13-14 And the Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?’ 14 Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.”

The Lord is able to do all things! With God nothing is impossible, Jesus taught His disciples, **“The things which are impossible with men are possible with God”** Luke 18:27.

In recognizing the Lord’s presence in our lives and giving Him the honor due him, it is important for us to believe the Word of the Lord. There are many truths of Holy Scripture which the Lord has presented to us that the world has found incredible. All

too often even Christians have been led to doubt and misbelief because of the influence of our human reason and the ridicule of the world around us. The world laughs at the truth of creation, that the Lord in His power and wisdom created the world in six twenty-four hour days. They find that assertion of Holy Scripture to be too incredible to believe.

They are also find the cross itself to be foolishness, that God would be so blood thirsty as to require such a gruesome sacrifice for the sins of the world!

They find the resurrection to be incredible! Many, even within the visible church, teach that the Lord's resurrection may be simply referring to the resurrection of His ideas and teachings, and not of His actual physical body. Such a bold statement against the Word of the Lord has been circulating since the earliest days of the church. Some of the Corinthian Christians found the teaching of the resurrection to be too incredible. But Paul taught them, **"If the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. 17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins** (1 Cor. 15:16-17)!

The Lord comes to us with His grace in His Word. He tells us things too wonderful for us to comprehend, and yet by the Spirit's power we are led to receive that Word into our hearts. God has revealed to us in His Word the most incredible truth of all, that He loved us in spite of our sins, and that He sent His Son into the world. As the Seed of Abraham, the Seed of Isaac all the nations of the earth have been blessed.

"Is anything too hard for the Lord!" No, with God all things are possible, and all shall be fulfilled according to His Word of Promise. Today our Lord presents us once again with an incredible and wonderful truth, that as He comes to us in the Sacrament of the Altar we shall receive His very body and true blood given and shed for us for the forgiveness of sins. This truth, which many find too incredible to believe, is a wondrous assurance of God's grace and Jesus' presence with us, an assurance of the life and salvation we have in His sacrifice. We honor the Lord with the faith He has given us, believing that His Word is true.

When the Lord comes to us how shall we receive Him? Let us humble ourselves before the Lord as Abraham did. We shall eagerly serve Him to the utmost of our ability. Most of all, let us hear the Word of the Lord for this is the best way that we may honor His presence in our lives. Hear the Word through which He brings us that one thing needful that shall not be taken away from us.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.