

2nd Sunday after Pentecost – 18 June 17

Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7; Psalm 116:1,10-17; Romans 5:1-8; Matthew 9:35 – 10:23

Last Sunday, Natasha Watson shared with us a truth that many people who have been involved with church polity over the years might think was pure folly. She told us that she appreciated Synod and that, while it was a lot of work, she enjoyed it! She was right. Synod this year, and two years ago, was worth the time spent. We were reminded by our Bishop of why we gather at Synod as a Diocese every two years, and why we gather as a Church congregation every Sunday. We are called to acknowledge that we are Missional People.

We have not been called to become, sometime in the future, Missional People. We have not been called to gather to study and discuss whether or not we might wish to become a Missional Church. There is no future decision to be made. There is no Parish Council directive to be hammered out. There is no consensus to work toward. *We are already Missional People, and as such, this Church is already a Missional Church!* By virtue of our Baptism we have already agreed with the truth that we are Missional people...

For a moment let's set aside this new thinking of being Missional People. We will get back to that in a minute. Right now, I would like you to consider the concept of eternity and God's perspective, how God sees things ...

When the 3 men came to Abraham and told him that Sarah, already in her 90's, would become a mother, and soon at that, Sarah laughed out loud. She considered the possibility that she, this late in her life, could ever become a mother, to be preposterous. She had already spent her time grieving what she had hoped for but what had not happened. She had given up the dream of holding her own child and watching her offspring become the father of many. She was reconciled to a quiet hearth and home for whatever few years she and Abraham might have left. From Sarah's perspective, the reality she woke up to every morning was the reality that would be the rest of her life.

Now, let's look at this through the eyes of God; through eyes that see, at one and the same time, what was, what is and what will be ... When God looked at Sarah, he saw not a barren woman settled in to what was the end of her earthly days, but rather the mother of one would become the father of generations unnumbered. God did not see only what was obvious. God looked upon Sarah and saw what could be ...

Now, before we launch into the argument that Sarah was simply pre-destined to become the grandmother of generations to come, we need to acknowledge that Sarah could just as easily have refused to take on this role. Unlike Mary, the mother of God, Sarah did not conceive by immaculate conception. She had to have been willing to continue to live as Abraham's wife and allow herself to become pregnant. Just because the angel said it would happen did not mean that Sarah's choices were taken away. She could have kicked her old, centenarian husband out of her tent ... but she didn't. Sarah made the choice to continue to try to conceive and then she found that, after all those long years, she was indeed surprised by joy.

God saw all along what Sarah could become if she were to respond to God's call on her life and if she was willing to try something even when it seemed a futile effort. Sarah said yes to the possibilities that God had in store for her, and her dreams, when they came in line with God's purposes, came true.

So now that we have considered the significant shift in thinking and living that Sarah was able to embrace, we can begin thinking about our call, the expectation that God has on us, to become, and to live our lives as, Missional People.

In God's eyes, like Sarah, God already sees us in the potential we have to live as we are called to fully live. And what does that life look like that God already envisions us in? We are the sent ... We are the disciples of this day and age that God has called us to be. Like the 12 disciples that Jesus hand-picked and then sent out to share the Good News that he had come to forgive sins and bring new life, we are so chosen, called and sent. We are, each and every one of us, one of God's very own chosen Missional People.

As Jesus said to those original 12, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest." Whenever we gather in this place we are both asking God to send labourers out to harvest *and* we are volunteering to be one of those labourers!

Many people, upon their initial hearing of God's call upon them to become Missional, throw up those immediate roadblocks that let God know that surely, He is mistaken. How can we, good, faithful Anglicans, proud that we aren't "in your face with the gospel" Christians, be expected to become Missional? Doesn't being Missional mean actually sharing our faith with others? We are Anglican! We don't do that in our church! ... But the crux of this problem lies in the fact that, yes, we do indeed, as Anglicans, share our faith. We may not do it well all the time. And there may be a groundswell of support for those who think we shouldn't have to share our faith but, at the end of the day, we are still called, by virtue of our Baptism, to share the faith we have in Jesus Christ.

The good news about sharing the Good News is that we can relax when we find that this expectation of being Missional – of serving others in Christ's name and then sharing Christ's name with them – is hard for most everyone. Paul reminds us quite eloquently that if we find it difficult to do this then we are not alone. Others have struggled with this expectation as well, but they, like we will, have grown through the experience and become stronger, better, more faithful Christians.

"We also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

Let's look back on Sarah for a moment.

If we are to be quite honest, Sarah must have been petrified at the truth of her dream becoming a reality. Can you imagine how it must feel to begin thinking about having an infant, and then a toddler, and then not much later, a teenager dependent upon you for everything when you are nearly a hundred years old? Sarah's dream and the fulfilment of it came within the context of reality – her reality being that while God was giving her the gift she so long desired, it would still come with hard work, frustration, lots of prayer and patience mixed in with the joy and the wonder and the exhilaration of knowing that what she had always longed for was finally at hand.

As we continue as Anglican Christians in a world that is post-Christendom, we know the reality of how big our dream is that generations to come will fill our churches and share in the Good News that we have been living throughout our lives. We, like Sarah, can sit on our front porches watching the world go by, lamenting that "our time" has passed and worrying that with us, like with a barren Sarah, the end of our line has come.

Or, and this is a big "or" we can listen to God telling us that He sees in us that which we cannot *yet* see in ourselves – the generations that will come after us because we, like Sarah, were willing to make the choice to conceive new opportunities to raise children in the faith that we hold so very dear.

We are a Missional People and as such we need to conceive of a new way of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. This Good News is not a beautiful building with organ music and a Sunday School. Our Good News is that of a loving God who has given us the gift of new life, both now and in eternity, if we will believe that new life and hope and love can be possible for us.

We are a Missional People and we need to prepare ourselves, as Abraham and Sarah did, to take up our faith and move forward, out of this place, so that we can meet the ones who are waiting to follow in our faith's footsteps but who aren't going to come into this place if they haven't been invited first into a relationship with those who gather in this place.

God sees us as we will be, as we might be, if we are open to filling the potential God has given us. That potential can only be filled if and when we acknowledge and embrace the reality that *God has made us Missional People whose greatest purpose is to serve others in Christ's name and then share who Christ is with them.*