

“ULTRASOUND FAITH!”

A SERMON BASED ON THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOK OF GENESIS (18:1-15 (21:1-7) AND PRESENTED FOR ORLEAN UMC ON JUNE 14, 2020----- (THE SECOND SUNDAY OF A SIX WEEK SERMON SERIES THAT WILL TAKE US THROUGH SOME OF THE MAJOR THEMES IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS)

THERE WAS A TIME, NOT LONG AGO, WHEN DETERMINING THE GENDER OF YOUR CHILD WAS FAR FROM SCIENTIFIC..... OLD AUNT HATTIE, FOR EXAMPLE, WAS CONVINCED YOU COULD TELL WHETHER THE HAPPY COUPLE WAS GOING TO HAVE A BOY OR A GIRL BY THE WAY THE MOTHER CARRIED THE BABY..... IF IT LOOKED LIKE THE BABY WAS RESTING LOW IN THE MOTHER'S WOMB, THE CHILD WAS SAID TO BE A BOY.....

IF THE MOTHER WAS CARRYING HIGH, IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A GIRL...

GRANDMA MARIE, ON THE OTHER HAND, WAS CONVINCED THE GENDER COULD BE DETERMINED BY THE MOTHER'S CRAVINGS. IF THE MOM-TO-BE WANTED SWEETS AND CHOCOLATES, SHE WAS HAVING A GIRL. IF SHE WANTED THINGS THAT WERE SOUR, IT WAS SAID THE BABY MUST BE A BOY....

THEN THE NEIGHBORS WOULD CHIME IN. THEY BELIEVED THE KEY WAS WITH THE FATHER, NOT THE MOTHER.

IF HE GAINED SYMPATHY WEIGHT DURING THE PREGNANCY, THE BABY WAS THOUGHT TO BE A GIRL. IF HE DIDN'T, IT WAS A BOY. MAYBE THIS IS RELATED TO THE PREVIOUS THINKING. A MOM CRAVING SWEETS MIGHT SHARE THEM WITH HER HUSBAND.....

ANOTHER MEANS OF TRYING TO DETERMINE THE GENDER OF A CHILD SEEMS A LITTLE MORE "MAGICAL." THE MOTHER, OR A WELL-MEANING FRIEND OR RELATIVE, WOULD ATTACH THE MOTHER'S WEDDING RING OR A NEEDLE TO A PIECE OF STRING AND DANGLE IT OVER HER BELLY.

**IF THE RING STARTED TO MOVE IN A CIRCLE,
THE BELIEVERS SAID THE BABY WAS A GIRL. IF
IT SWUNG BACK AND FORTH, THIS MEANT IT
WAS A BOY....**

**IN THE LATE 1970S, THESE METHODS OF TRYING
TO ASCERTAIN THE GENDER OF YOUR CHILD
STARTED TO FALL INTO DISUSE..... A MUCH
MORE ACCURATE SOLUTION TO EVERYONE'S
CURIOSITY HAD BECOME READILY AVAILABLE –
THE SONOGRAM OR ULTRASOUND**

AN ULTRASOUND MACHINE SENDS SOUND WAVES THAT ARE ABOVE OUR HEARING FREQUENCIES INTO OUR BODIES, AND RECORDS HOW THEY BOUNCE BACK TO THE MACHINE. IN REAL TIME, A COMPUTER RENDERS AN IMAGE FROM THAT DATA. THESE IMAGES CAN REVEAL A LOT, FROM POTENTIAL DIFFICULTIES WITH THE PREGNANCY TO THE GENDER OF THE CHILD.

SOON THE PARENTS' DILEMMA CHANGED FROM *HOW* TO DETERMINE IF THEY WERE HAVING A BOY OR A GIRL, TO DISCUSSING *IF* THEY WANTED TO *KNOW* THE CHILD'S GENDER BEFORE THE MOMENT OF BIRTH.

**OF COURSE, SARAH OF THE BIBLE DIDN'T HAVE
ULTRASOUND TECHNOLOGY AVAILABLE TO
HER..... YET AS FAR AS WE KNOW SHE WAS THE
FIRST WOMAN EVER TO KNOW CATEGORICALLY
THE GENDER OF HER UNBORN CHILD. SHE
DIDN'T DANGLE A NEEDLE OVER HER BELLY OR
JOURNAL HER CRAVINGS TO DETERMINE THE
GENDER OF HER CHILD. HER ULTRASOUND
FAITH IN THE LORD TOLD HER ALL SHE NEEDED
TO KNOW. SHE WAS HAVING A SON WHO WOULD
FULFILL GOD'S PROMISE TO HER AND ABRAHAM.**

AT FIRST, SARAH IS INCREDULOUS.... WHEN SHE OVERHEARS THE MESSENGERS OF GOD TELLING HER HUSBAND THAT SHE IS GOING TO HAVE A BABY, SHE LAUGHS. WHO COULD BLAME HER? THE THOUGHT OF HAVING A BABY AT HER ADVANCED AGE IS ABSURD. SHE SAYS HERSELF THAT HER HUSBAND IS OLD AND THAT SHE IS WELL PAST HER CHILDBEARING YEARS.

THE WRITERS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT ARE FAR LESS POLITE WITH THEIR ASSESSMENTS. *THE AUTHOR OF HEBREWS WRITES THAT ABRAHAM WAS SO OLD THAT HE WAS "AS GOOD AS DEAD."*

**IN HIS LETTER TO THE ROMANS, PAUL SAYS THE
SAME THING ABOUT ABRAHAM, THEN
ADDITIONALLY STATES THAT SARAH'S WOMB
WAS ALSO DEAD.**

HARSH.....VERY HARSH

**DESPITE THEIR LACK OF DECORUM, THE HARSH
ASSESSMENTS FOUND IN HEBREWS 11 AND
ROMANS 4 HAVE A POINT. A COUPLE IN THEIR
90S DOES NOT HAVE THE PHYSICAL ABILITY TO
CONCEIVE A CHILD WITHOUT THE ASSISTANCE
OF CRYOGENICS....**

BUT THIS ISN'T A STORY ABOUT WHAT IS POSSIBLE THROUGH SCIENCE..... NOR IS IT A STORY ABOUT AGING WELL. ROMANS AND HEBREWS REMIND US THAT THIS IS A STORY ABOUT FAITH.....ULTRASOUND FAITH.....

IT IS FUN TO THINK OF SARAH'S LAUGH THAT DAY. DID SHE JUST LOSE IT? HER EMBARRASSMENT AND DENIAL WHEN SHE HEARS THAT HER VISITORS OVERHEARD HER, SEEMS TO INDICATE THIS WAS AN INVOLUNTARY REACTION TO SEEMINGLY ABSURD NEWS.

DURING THE PREGNANCY, HOWEVER, SHE AND ABRAHAM MUST HAVE GROWN TO ACCEPT AND EVEN EMBRACE THE LAUGHTER. FOR NINE MONTHS, SARAH HAD REASON TO LAUGH EVERYWHERE SHE WENT. TELLING HER FRIENDS THAT SHE WAS HAVING HER FIRST CHILD AT 90 MUST HAVE BEEN A SOURCE OF JOY AND LAUGHTER. THE BABY SHOWER MUST HAVE BEEN A HOOT. WHEN SHE STARTED TO SHOW AND SAW PEOPLE ON THE STREET, THEIR PUZZLED LOOKS AND DOUBLE-TAKES MUST HAVE BEEN FUN TO SEE, AT LEAST FOR THE HAPPY COUPLE WITNESSING GOD'S LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS.

WHEN THE CHILD WAS BORN, ABRAHAM NAMED THE BABY ISAAC, THE HEBREW WORD FOR LAUGHTER. THEIR ULTRASOUND FAITH IN GOD'S PROMISE HAD BROUGHT JOY AND LAUGHTER IN THEIR LIVES.

ISAAC, THE CHILD NAMED "LAUGHTER," WAS NOT JUST A LITTLE BUNDLE OF JOY FOR HIS UNLIKELY PARENTS. HE WAS ALSO THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PROMISE TO THE WHOLE WORLD. ABRAHAM AND SARAH'S ULTRASOUND FAITH IN THE LOVE AND PROMISES OF GOD ENABLED THEM TO SEE WHAT APPEARED IMPOSSIBLE.

**WE ARE CALLED TO HAVE THIS ULTRASOUND
FAITH AS WELL.....**

**THE STORY OF THE BIRTH OF ISAAC IS NOT JUST
THE MIRACULOUS ORIGIN-STORY OF THE
PEOPLE OF ISRAEL. THIS IS A STORY ABOUT
THE LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS OF GOD AND THE
LENGTHS TO WHICH GOD IS WILLING TO GO TO
BLESS US....**

AS HUMAN BEINGS WE GET TO CHOOSE HOW WE VIEW THE WORLD AROUND US. LIKE A MOM-TO-BE SELECTING BETWEEN A WEDDING RING DANGLED OVER HER BELLY AND A SONOGRAM, WE CAN OPT TO VIEW OUR CIRCUMSTANCES THROUGH THE LENS OF WHAT WE CAN SEE, OR WITH ULTRASOUND FAITH LIKE ABRAHAM AND SARAH.....SEEING SOMETHING BETTER

AGAINST ALL HOPE, AS PAUL WRITES... AGAINST REASON, AGAINST WHAT THEY COULD DO THEMSELVES, ABRAHAM AND SARAH BELIEVED THAT GOD HAD SOMETHING GOOD IN STORE FOR THEM. THEY COULD SEE A NEW FUTURE GOD WAS PROMISING.

IT IS PRETTY EASY AT TIMES TO TRUST ONLY IN WHAT WE CAN SEE, EVEN WHEN THAT IS INCREDIBLY UNRELIABLE. MANY OF US HAVE BEEN THERE. WE HAVE COME TO THE END OF OUR RESOURCES, THE END OF OUR ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IS HAPPENING IN OUR LIVES.

+ SOME HAVE RECEIVED A DIAGNOSIS THEY HAVE NO IDEA WHAT TO DO WITH.

+ OTHERS HAVE BEEN CALLED INTO THEIR SUPERVISOR'S OFFICE AND BEEN TOLD THEY NO LONGER HAVE A JOB....

+ OTHERS HAVE HAD SOMEONE WHOM THEY CARE DEEPLY ABOUT HURT OR DISAPPOINT THEM.

+ SOME OF US HAVE BEEN EXACTLY WHERE ABRAHAM AND SARAH WERE, DESPERATELY WANTING TO BE PARENTS AND HEARING THAT HAVING A CHILD IS NOT LIKELY TO HAPPEN -- AT LEAST WITHOUT THE HELP OF TECHNOLOGY AND AT GREAT EXPENSE.....

WE HAVE FALLEN INTO THOSE TIMES WHEN ALL WE CAN SEE IN FRONT OF US IS STRUGGLE, HARDSHIP, DISAPPOINTMENT AND DENIAL.

THE DARKNESS SEEMS THICK AND WE'RE CONVINCED THAT WE DO NOT SEE THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL, BUT RATHER THE TRAIN THAT WILL SOON RUN US OVER.

THIS CAN ALSO HAPPEN TO OUR COMMUNITIES. IN A WORLD WHERE BAD NEWS TRAVELS FAST, WE CAN BECOME CONVINCED THAT OUR NEIGHBORHOOD, NATION, WORLD OR CHURCH IS DOOMED. WE LOOK AT THE SITUATION AND SEE NO SOLUTIONS EXCEPT BAD ONES.

ULTRASOUND FAITH, HOWEVER, OFFERS US A VIEW WE WOULDN'T TYPICALLY BE ABLE TO DISCERN. *THROUGH THE EYES OF FAITH, WE SEE GOD AND GOD'S PROMISES OF BLESSING EVEN WHEN THEY SEEM IMPOSSIBLE OR ABSURD.* WE FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT GOD HAS NOT LEFT US TO FIGURE IT OUT ON OUR OWN. INSTEAD, *ULTRASOUND FAITH ALLOWS US TO BELIEVE -- SOMETIMES AGAINST ALL HOPE -- THAT GOD IS WORKING OUT BLESSING IN OUR LIVES AND IN THE WORLD.*

+ WHEN THE DIAGNOSIS COMES, ULTRASOUND FAITH GIVES US THE STRENGTH TO FACE THE ILLNESS, KNOWING WE ARE IN GOD'S HANDS THROUGH IT ALL.

+ WHEN OUR JOB IS TAKEN, ULTRASOUND FAITH GIVES US THE COURAGE TO SEND OUT RESUMES BELIEVING THAT GOD HAS SOMETHING BETTER FOR US...

+ WHEN THE RELATIONSHIP APPEARS BEYOND RECONCILIATION, ULTRASOUND FAITH GIVES US THE PATIENCE TO WAIT, TRUST AND PRAY FOR GOD TO SOFTEN THE HEART OF THE OTHER, OR FOR THE HUMILITY TO ASK FOR FORGIVENESS.

+ WHEN WE ARE TOLD WE MIGHT NEVER BE ABLE TO HAVE A BABY, ULTRASOUND FAITH OPENS OUR EYES TO NEW POSSIBILITIES OF BECOMING PARENTS....

+ WHEN ALL WE SEE OF THE WORLD IS DARKNESS, PROBLEMS AND PAIN, ULTRASOUND FAITH CALLS US TO REACH OUT TO THOSE IN NEED. IT IS ULTRASOUND FAITH THAT SENDS US INTO THE TROUBLED SPOTS IN OUR CITY OR COMMUNITY ---- NATION OR WORLD TO WORK AND REACH OUT ----WITH OTHERS----- TO BRING CHANGE AND THE LIGHT OF HOPE TO OTHERS....

IT IS ULTRASOUND FAITH THAT SENDS US OUT
TO REPAIR HOMES, PROVIDE HEALTHCARE AND
BUILD SCHOOLS.....

IT IS ULTRASOUND FAITH THAT BRINGS THE
PEOPLE OF GOD TOGETHER FOR WORSHIP,
SUNDAY SCHOOL AND BIBLE STUDY, BELIEVING
THAT GOD WILL BLESS US, SO THAT GOD MIGHT
THEN CHANGE THE WORLD THROUGH US.

ABRAHAM AND SARAH LAUGHED AT THE IDEA
THAT GOD MIGHT BLESS THEM IN THEIR
ADVANCED AGE WITH THE GIFT OF A CHILD.

THEIR ULTRASOUND FAITH, HOWEVER,
ALLOWED THEM TO BELIEVE SOMETHING
BETTER. THEY BELIEVED GOD'S PROMISE, AND
THEY COULD SEE THE BLESSING THAT WAS TO
COME FOR THEM AND THE WHOLE WORLD.

SO MAY WE.....

PRAISE GOD AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND

FOR ME.....AMEN

