**First Presbyterian Church, Tucumcari**

*The Church With the Holy Spirit Window*

**June 18, 2017 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**11:00 a.m.**

**Rev. Amy Pospichal, Pastor Marjorie McKenzie, Accompanist**

**Call to Worship (please see bulletin)**

**Opening Prayer**

Lord, on this day celebrating Fathers, we praise you and thank you:

For dads who have given of themselves for our raising

For servants who have given of their lives for our security

For all people who have filled in the gaps so we know more of your providence, your love, your forgiveness.

We praise you today on this hot day in June. Let our words and song adore you for the merciful love of Christ our Savior! Amen.

**Call to Confession**

**Prayer of Confession (please see bulletin)**

**Assurance of Pardon**

Through the love of God in Christ Jesus, we are forgiven.  
**Thanks be to God! Amen**.

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**\*Gloria Patri**

**Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end, Amen, Amen.**

**Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19 (please see bulletin)**

**Prayers of the People**

Creator God,

You are our mighty God, great parent of all the universe.

And it is in you we move and have our being.

You surround us with love, offer us grace and forgiveness. You have given us all the world to care for and enjoy.

You have provided us gifts and talents by which we can live and serve you.

Thank you for all you have done and will continue to do for us.

This day we thank you for fathers and father figures. We thank you for the times when you have used them to teach us right from wrong, how to have good relationships with others, how to be ready for what life brings us. We pray for those who are grieving their fathers, and for those who didn’t know their fathers.

Almighty Father, we know you love those who are suffering today, and that you even love those who don’t love you back. Comfort those who do not know you, and teach us how to speak of your love to the hurting world.

Be in and among all the places where your children cry out in need.

Strengthen us to befriend the friendless and give hope to the hopeless.

Fill us with the laughter of the forgiven, that we show forth the joy of a life in you.

We especially pray for health to return to Sharon. We especially pray for the safety of those who are traveling, such as the Goldstons and the Schusters…

We now take a moment in silence to lift up our prayers.

God, you are a friend to those who call upon you. Teach our hearts to remember you in our own times of need. For it is your Son who taught us to pray by saying, “Our Father…Amen.”

**Offering**

**Time out for Teaching: Mysterious Strangers**

You know you’re in for a good story if the story involves either: a man going on a long journey or a stranger comes to town. We have both of those happening in today’s Bible lesson. The entire story of Abraham and Sarah is about their life journey. They were nomads, always moving about. But here, in Genesis 18, three strangers, rather nondescript travelers, visit them.

All we know is they were men. And it was customary for travelers to visit someone’s tent and receive hospitality.

Abraham shows them extreme hospitality, killing a calf, has a servant cook it for them, he and his wife on them.

This is the story that many of us remember when we hear the phrase, “entertaining angels unawares…”

The reason is because they were God’s messengers, come to bring Abraham and Sarah a message of joy. That they would have a child.

There are many places in the Bible where God uses nondescript strangers to speak to people. You could say that these persons are extensions of God – heavenly arms reaching into our very human and mundane life. The one who creates the heavens and the earth can do that sort of thing.

We need to listen to mysterious strangers. We don’t know which ones are God’s angels, and which ones aren’t. Or maybe God is using someone you ALREADY know – someone who isn’t a stranger – as one of His messengers. Be watchful and hospitable, for God’s holy presence is not far, far away from us, but right near by.

**Prayer for Illumination**

**Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7**

1The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day.2He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground.3He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant.4Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree.5Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on-since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said."6And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes."7Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it.8Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

9They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent."10Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him.11Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.12So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?"13The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?'14Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son."15But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. He said, "Oh yes, you did laugh."

1The LORD dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had promised.2Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him.3Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him.4And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.5Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.6Now Sarah said, "God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me."7And she said, "Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

**Gospel Matthew 9:35-10:8**

35Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness.36When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.37Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few;38therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

10:1Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.2These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John;3Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus;4Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

5These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans,6but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.7As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'8Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.

**Sermon “What Sarah Heard” Rev. Amy Pospichal**

I love how Sarah refers to her husband Abraham as “old,” saying, “After I have grown old, and my husband is old…” There are plenty of humorous moments in this wonderful story of what Sarah heard and makes her laugh. According to the Scriptures, Sarah was about 10 years younger than Abraham, but still ridiculously past the age of childbearing.

No wonder she laughed when she overheard what the mysterious strangers told Abraham. I would have been rolling on the floor.

How absurd. A woman her age? And Abraham HIS age?

A son was cherished a gift, for a son was needed in order to take over the family property. They had desired a son all their married life. But now?

At her mature age, Sarah had probably already grown to accept that she would die childless, she had probably already grieved this fact, and moved on. So she laughed.

I would say her laugh came from disbelief. Perhaps it was her way of protecting herself should this news not come true. We can relate to this, for it is easier to protect ourselves from disappointment, by laughing at the impossible, afraid to believe good news, even the good news of God’s grace. Too many times we have been fooled by the words of strangers.

Learning to laugh and play and believe the impossible can be an act of faith. Where Sarah made a mistake was in disbelieving the news, as preposterous as it sounds. But remember that oft quoted line from the Bible – “With God anything is possible.” There is a fine line between protecting ourselves from disappointment and being good stewards of faith. Many of our fathers have taught us such lessons: to be prepared for the worst, while trusting in divine providence. We have to have both. As children of God, we should do all we can and then leave the rest to Him. There we can find the freedom to laugh.

There is a lot of research about fatherhood nowadays that tells us the importance of playing and what it teaches us about confidence and risk taking. A researcher from Columbia University finds that Dads are more likely to roughhouse with their children, a form of play that helps teach kids to have self-control over their bodies and emotions. Fathers are also more likely to encourage their kids to embrace healthy risk-taking, both on the playground and in life, and that strengthens their ambitions throughout their lives.

Maybe Dads – and Moms too - who have taught us to play and laugh are really mimicking what God is trying to teach us - lessons in faith, lessons in risk-taking.

What Sarah heard made her laugh. And the best part of it is, the joke’s on her and she knows it. God’s promise came true, and it gave her something to laugh about for the rest of her life. God defied her expectations.

God gives us plenty of things to amuse us. Just look at the cast of characters in our Gospel reading today. The Son of God has picked some pretty questionable people to be His disciples. We are given their occupations and their family connections, including the last on the list, “Judas Iscariot, who would betray him…” Jill Duffield, editor for the Presbyterian Outlook magazine, writes: “These Twelve? These are the ones Jesus chose to cast out demons and cure the sick.” Then she says, if Jesus was starting up a new corporation, these 12 would be the least likely candidates, the least impressive to have on your Board of Directors…But these are the ones Jesus called. Her point is, God has a sense of humor. God is a risk-taker.

How true. God chose us. But God didn’t call us to be perfect. God calls us to learn not to take ourselves too seriously, to show others that it is by grace that we live. To show that we can play and laugh together and be His children, living by His promises. To show what it looks like when a people take the risk believing that God can do the impossible. So…laugh. Amen.

**\*Closing Hymn**

**\*Benediction**

**Announcements:**