

Year A Proper 6  
Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7  
Sarah Laughed

In our family, humor was a treasured commodity. When the Sniffin clan gathered there was always an abundance of story telling and laughter. My parents were both past masters at telling a joke and delivering the punch line with perfect timing. Among their friends certain jokes were so common that only a word or two, needed mention and the group would burst into laughter. By the time I was in my teens, I had my own repertoire of jokes. It was clear to me, even then, that different jokes were funnier in different situations and to different audiences. Men told jokes among themselves that they did not tell around the women in their families. Women told stories and jokes when the men weren't around that were never shared with their male counterparts. Certain stories were not told in front of me. However I overheard many- the points of which I didn't understand for many years.

Laughter, I learned was a balm in times of sorrow and disappointment. Humor was a survival tool that aided in coping with stress. Laughter was a response to entertainment, an exclamation of joy and relief. Humor was a way to vent anger, and a way to deflect oppression. It was better shared. It is said that 'A smile is generic, but a laugh is specific'. The laugh is a reaction to a moment.

The source of women's humor is different than men's humor. It isn't better, just different. Women see humor in

the happenings of each day.. They see the humor in their own lives. Their humor is not aimed at the failings of another. Let me give you an example of situational humor. When my son was about to be born, the nurse came to the hospital room to prepare me for a C-section. In those days, they cleared your body of hair from your chest to your backside. For a bulbous pregnant lady this was embarrassing and hysterical. But, the most humorous part was that the nurse was humming Moon River the whole time. Lucile Ball and Gilda Radner gave us endless bits of situational humor.

One commentary writer I read said that he didn't understand how St. Paul could count Sarah as a woman of great faith, since she laughed at God. I think he missed the point. Men's humor is different. God gave Sarah laughter in the humor and joy of the situation. The laughter is a blessing, a sign of God's presence and action in Sarah's life as well as in Abraham's life. One writer said that God dragged them into grace and convinced them to do their part.

There is a literary form, which comes up when God calls someone to serve. First, God tells the person what is desired. The person then refuses. God calls again and Gives a sign as a token of sincerity. Sometimes this repeats itself. Sarah hears and laughs. God accuses. Sarah denies. God repeats and gives a sign. Sarah denies. God says something like 'Oh, yes you did!'

Some commentaries see this as chastisement. They see Sarah's reaction as rude and disbelieving. What if she was laughing, not at God's ability to bring about the birth but the absurdities of the circumstances? If you factor in Sarah's age of 89, according to the story, and Abraham's age of 99, and you factor in arthritis, poor eyesight, lack of flexibility and muscle control along with breathing difficulties you see how Sarah might have seen some humor here. If I had learned such a thing, laughter would have been a natural response.

Hi and I attended LaMas Classes in the later months of my pregnancy. We were respectively 10 and 20 years older than the rest of the couples in our class. A room full of large ladies and thin men made us laugh. Heavy breathing, in unison, made us laugh. Women rolling around with beach ball tummies trying to exercise with their men helplessly watching, made us laugh. I can say in truth that laughter was the order of the day in these classes for me, until they showed the film. I then had a "ticket, please" experience and wanted out of it.

God gave laughter to Sarah as a sign of joy in a life that was marked with the sorrow of barrenness. Childbirth and child rearing are occasions of pain and difficulty, but also much more laughter and happy tears. This laughter must have stood as a barrier against what had gone before for both husband and wife. Life was hard for them, moving around. Women's work was difficult. The women made it bearable with laughter. Out of shame and sadness comes

at God's initiative, redemption. What is called the 'Divine Surprise.'

What about you? Has God delivered a divine surprise to you? A calling that you might have initially seen as humorous? Has God said, "Yes, you did laugh". Has God enjoyed the humor with you, as the humor shared with Sarah was enjoyed?