

You may recall the story of Abraham and Sarah. After the times of Noah and the covenant after the Flood, God called Abram to leave his home to a new land. And God made this promise, "I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." Blessed to be a blessing. The whole world will be blessed through Abraham and Sarah. But it's hard to be a great people when you have no children. Today we pick up the story with the visit of the LORD to the tent of Abraham and Sarah who has been promised a son.

Genesis 18:1-15, (21:1-7) (NIV)

The Three Visitors 18 The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. ² Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

³ He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord,^[a] do not pass your servant by. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. ⁵ Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant."

"Very well," they answered, "do as you say."

⁶ So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs^[b] of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread."⁷ Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. ⁸ He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.

⁹ "Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "There, in the tent," he said. ¹⁰ Then one of them said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son."

Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. ¹¹ Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?"¹³ Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' ¹⁴ Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son."

¹⁵ Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh." But he said, "Yes, you did laugh."

Genesis 21 New International Version (NIV) The Birth of Isaac

21 Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised.

² Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him.

³ Abraham gave the name Isaac^[a] to the son Sarah bore him. ⁴ When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. ⁵ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

⁶ Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." ⁷ And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

Proclamation of the Word

When I was dating Chuck and would have dinner with his family, the same blessing was said over the food at the Conrads,

Come Lord Jesus our guest to be, and bless these gifts bestowed by Thee.

Bless our dear ones everywhere, and keep them in Thy loving care.

I learned that this is the Moravian Blessing. The Conrads have been Moravian for many generations. They are branch of the Christian family that live mostly in Winston-Salem, NC and Bethlehem, PA. They were part of the early Reformation, were persecuted by the church and fled from then Moravia to what is now Germany. Some migrated to the US to find freedom of religion. This Moravian blessing has become meaningful in our lives as we repeat it over and over. We hold hands and say it together. When Avery was small he had a bit of a lisp, he thought we were saying,

Come, Lord Jesus, our guest to be, and bless these gifts bestowed by Bobby.

Bobby would be a good name for God. Bobby sounds like a nice uncle who might pitch the baseball with you in the backyard, or grill the hotdogs and hamburgers at the cookout. Bobby sounds comforting and fun like a big brother who might rub you on the head and tell you he was proud of you, turn his stereo up to sing and dance with you, or let you cry on his shoulder. Or Bobby could be an Opthamologist who hears a call to serve the poor and travels the world giving sight to the blind. Bobby would be a good name for God. Our image and names for God are many and varied, because no one word alone captures the mystery and nearness, the majesty and intimacy of God.

Today we encounter another picture of God from Scripture. Abraham and Sarah encounter the three men who we know are a visitation of the Lord himself. God in three persons, blessed Trinity. Now last week on Trinity Sunday we read the Great Commission where Jesus sent the disciples into the world to make disciples, baptize and teach. And when we baptize we do so in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Holy Trinity of Love. Today we baptize (d) Margaret and Whitney into the covenant of love- the covenant God made with Abraham and Sarah to be a blessing to all nations. It all began here with Father Abraham and Mother Sarah...and God. God, who is Love in Relationship, is shown as a Trinity to our earliest ancestors.

The Rublev Icon you see shown today is a depiction of the Holy Trinity dating to around 1400 Russia. At the time of the artist Rublev, the Holy Trinity was the embodiment of spiritual unity, peace, harmony, mutual love, and humility. Perhaps you can agree with me, that we need God's unity, peace, harmony, mutual love, and humility today just as much as 600 years ago in Rublev's day. The Icon is also known as *The Hospitality of Abraham*. Gathered at the tent or house of Abraham, you can see the Oak of Mamre in the background. The three visitors are shown blessing the cup. Notice that they are in a perfect circle with an open space for you and me to sit at table with them- the Welcome Table. God's hospitality shown to us calls us to do the same. According to the writer of

Hebrews Chapter 13 Verse 2" Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it."

So what does it look like to Welcome God like Abraham? when the prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus our guest to be, and bless these gifts bestowed by Thee" becomes lived action?

And what does it look like to welcome the stranger and by doing so "entertain angels without knowing it"?

This week in Bible School *God's Abundant Orchard* we learned stories of people sharing the gifts of God with each other because we have a God who first blesses us generously with grace, food, and all we need. The children sang it so profoundly, "I'm gonna feed you (clap) when you are hungry because God's love lives in me." We, who have been welcomed to God's table of grace, in turn welcome others. When we are baptized into the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we are called to reflect that grace and love first shown to us. We treat all we meet as we would Christ Jesus.

One thing I noticed in this Scripture is how eager and ready to share Abraham was. Listen to the verbs.

⁶So Abraham **hurried** into the tent to Sarah. "**Quick,**" he said, "get three seahs^[b] of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread."

⁷Then he **ran** to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who **hurried** to prepare it.

From a drowsy afternoon nap to whipped to a frenzy, Abraham jumped at the opportunity to serve. The chaos that threw them into a tailspin was only the beginning. They would receive news that Sarah would have a baby. And nothing brings chaos like a baby- especially if you are already retired and living on Social Security. But just imagine, this is the beginning of a great line that leads to Jesus who will be a blessing to the whole world through his life, death and resurrection. Their world is turned upside down, but just wait, God will turn the whole world upside down.

Which makes me think, I wonder if Abraham and Sarah were so ready to serve because they expected the LORD to show up and do what he promised...which also makes me wonder if we really believe the promises to Abraham and through him to us. Abraham had just heard that he was to be a father of nations, a blessing to the whole world, yet he was child-less and low on hope. Yet, he believed the LORD would do what he promised. Maybe that is why he was ready. Perhaps if we really believed the promises of God's blessing and grace, we would be as expectant, eager to serve and live out blessing. Do we come ready and expectant to worship praying for God to work and speak in the hearts and minds of all the worshipers? Do we look for God's hand at work daily, expectantly, devotedly? Do we expect God to show up?

Come, Lord Jesus our guest to be and bless these gifts bestowed by Thee.

I want to share some good news with you in the wake of some very difficult news this week. Some ways God has been doing that through his servants:

1. This week our children fed Hank the Farmer Bank with coins and dollars to share their money. The money they raised this week alone will provide over 900 prepared meals the children will make when they meet their goal. The children will host a Rise Against Hunger truck where we will package meals together next year.
2. On Friday our older children went with the Society of St. Andrews to glean food from the fields, just as they did in biblical times. The leftover produce that wasn't perfect-looking enough for the grocery stores was gathered by the children and taken to Clemson Community Care to provide fresh produce to our neighbors.
3. Another kind of gleaning... one of our own, Corey Greene, who just graduated from Clemson and was working in the dining hall. Corey noticed a great deal of excess perishable goods left over during shutdown times like summer break, spring break and extended holiday weekends. With the help of PRTM faculty and staff, Corey started a program to donate these products to the community through Our Daily Rest in Seneca. He has organized the donation of almost 1000 pounds of food to the community in the past four months. I should mention that Corey is the son of LeAnne and Dan Greene.

Like the small loaves and fishes in the hands of Jesus, many are fed when we share what God gives us. And the VBS kids were taught that it started with a young boy who gave his lunch. We will be visited by the God when we do. Later Jesus would tell us, according to Matthew 25, that when we feed the hungry, clothed the naked, welcome the stranger, visit the sick and the imprisoned, we do so to Christ himself in our neighbor. To neglect to show hospitality to the stranger is to neglect Christ. Disciples of Jesus Christ are blessed to be a blessing of God's gracious gifts.

The LORD showed up at the table of Abraham and Sarah. They went above and beyond the offer of bread and water. They prepared a fine meal of beef, yogurt, and the best bread. God's promises are sure. God's blessings are abundant.

Grace always comes first. Because that grace is there, God's people can respond with their best. Because we have found favor in God's eyes, it is possible to welcome God, and one another, with hospitality and generosity, as a favored and welcome guest.

Prayer: God of the prophets and apostles, you greeted old Abraham and Sarah with news of wonder and life. Send us into the world to preach good news, as Jesus did, heal the sick, resist evil, and bring the outcast home. Amen.

ⁱ Hebrews 13:2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little. - President Franklin D. Roosevelt