



***“Give to us
Laughter”***
Genesis 18:1-15
Sep. 14, 2008
Rev. Shelley Lavenne

I’ve been thinking a lot this past week about Sarah’s laughter and then the angel’s response to her disbelief: “Is anything too hard for God?” Or perhaps we could say, “Is anything too big for God?”

Firstly, it’s that laughter part. Because I’ve noticed over the last months that I’ve not laughed much. Didn’t know why that was – because it’s a healthy part of life, for us to laugh, isn’t it. And then one wise person said to me – “Well laughing is a risky thing, isn’t it. It means letting go.”

“Oh,” I said, and every since that day, nearly two weeks ago, I’ve found myself laughing and laughing often. It’s like that saying – “Let go and let God.”

Of course, I’ve been here six years now and so many of you know that one of my repeating sins is that I’ve a hard time letting go. I want A+B to add up to C and I want to know what C is and have it planned out.

But that’s not how life goes, is it? We may know what B is and have a bit of an inkling of what A is but certainly not what C will be. And that’s why we’re called to a life of faith.

A person who can’t laugh isn’t looking for the amazing things that God is doing in our lives.

On Monday night, five of us gathered around a table to plan worship and our children and youth programs. And we realized that not one of the five had been here when you tore down the old church building and built this one. You built with the intention it could be a community building these towns could take pride in. You envisioned a place where everyone would be welcome – as the Jesus Christ’s Gospel of unconditional love teaches us.

You hoped other people would come, you may have anticipated but you didn’t know for sure. And yet, in faith, you went ahead anyway.

You had faith, you lived in hope. And others have come and still come and we have this great ministry together in this community.

A plus B does = C, a wonderful type of C, we just don’t know exactly what that C is.

I was talking to one of our younger adults this past week – who unfortunately will be moving away from our community. But she told me one reason this church community is important to her. She said there are other people who have been through tough times and got through those and they have the ability to shrug off difficult times. That strength, that attitude was helpful to her

You’ve been through tough times and God has seen you through and you know – that in whatever the future brings – God will see you through that, as well.

Laughter is a prelude to faith, one famous theologian of the last century wrote.¹ Of course, to be faithful people you have to laugh. Because there is so much of faith that doesn't make sense on a rational level. Sarah laughs because how can an old woman have a child. I laugh that I'm a mother of a three-year old and I'm in my mid-40s. God does incredibly things in our lives – if we have eyes to see it.

A woman who rationally thinks she's beyond child-bearing years can give birth to a child. A little United church with a handful of people worshipping on Sunday in the dinky little towns of Turner Valley and Black Diamond has a thriving ministry in it's community. In fact, it's busier than ever.

There's some dichotomy. Small Church – thriving ministry. Small Church – doing great things, making a difference in the lives of people in their community.

And yet, that is who we are. Small Church, Big ministry.

In addition to our other ministries, Literacy for Life has moved their office in. With them, we are addressing the fact that 40 per cent of our adult population in these towns haven't finished high school. Women were using the sanctuary to make projects to sell to help people with AIDS in Africa. We continue to offer opportunities for spiritual growth. People from our local hospital are coming over this week to check out our labyrinth. The list goes on and on.

Small Church – thriving ministry. Doesn't make any sense, but by God, that's who you are. That's who we are. A people of faith who are doing great things.

At the end of the summer, the Official Board looked at our deficit budget. We always have a deficit at the end of the summer. In fact, like all Churches, we have a deficit 11 months of the year. It's a worry – because it's a slightly larger deficit than usual. Givings remain good but our expenses have gone up as they do in an economy like we have. Also, we hoped that part of our outreach in renting space would bring in some revenue but it also puts up our costs.

Now another reason I worried is this – because each Fall when we face our deficit – we panic and we get fearful and we fall into thinking that A+B equals C but we, this tiny little Church won't get to C. I know that because I've been here for six years. We can't even imagine getting to C. "It ain't going to happen," we say to ourselves. And even if we don't say those words out loud – we think them.

Fortunately we have some wise folks on our board. These wise folks said, "Deficit causes fear and fear shuts us down so we can't think clearly." These wise board members named that that happens. And because they named that, we started to laugh, we laughed at our selves, we laughed at the incongruity of faith. And with laughter comes calmness and the ability to talk about solutions and possible ways to deal with the deficit. One of those is we have a sign up for volunteer custodians each week.

And the Board also asks that the resources of our congregation be a part of each of our prayers. They ask that each Sunday, one of you stand up and say – let's pray for the resources to continue our ministry. Let's pray for our vital ministry to this community. And we pray with confidence, because we are a people of faith.

As Christians, as individuals, as a Church, let us be careful to not belittle our own person, our Church, our community. That's what Sarah did and that's the trap we often fall into. We think little of ourselves; we say that's impossible or that'll never happen.

Is anything too big for God?", the stranger asks Sarah rhetorically. Of course not. Amazing things happen through God. "Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we

¹ Reinhold Niebuhr, "Humour and Faith," *Twenty Centuries of Great Preaching*, eds. Clyde E. Fant and William M. Pinson, vol. 10 (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1971)

can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever".²

Small Church, Big ministry – what a wonderful absurdity we are. And what joyous reason to laugh, celebrate and rejoice. AMEN.

² *From the Anglican Daily Office, based on Ephesians 3:20-21*