

Genesis 18:1-15 Pentecost 9, August 11, 2019

## God Wants To Visit with You

It was too much for one person. She didn't know what had come over her. Her house was a mess. There was nothing ready to eat. Yet, for some reason, she decided to invite the most famous man in the country over for dinner. What had she been thinking? To make things worse, her sister was just relaxing on the couch talking with the guy. Finally, she snapped, "Doesn't anyone care I'm doing everything by myself? Tell her to help me!" The man gently smiled, turned to her, and said, "Martha, Martha, you're worried about many things, but one thing is needful."

Jesus was teaching at Martha's house. Martha was missing all of it. True, she had many important things to do, but she could have been talking face to face with her savior. She was missing the most important thing in the world. With a few gentle words, Jesus brings her back to reality.

Martha was distracted from the Word by the busyness of the world. Today, however, we focus on a different kind of distraction. It's that feeling of unbelief you get when something is just too good to be true. That doubt you feel when what you see doesn't match up with what you're told. But **God wants to visit with you! He comes to reassure you. Listen to him.**

In today's gospel, we saw the Son of God visiting, eating with and talking to his people. Jump back 2000 years from the time of Jesus to the time of Abraham. Again God met with, and ate with, and spoke with his people. The whole event is a little unclear for us. First verse: The LORD appeared to Abraham! Ever time God comes down to his people it's something to take note of. But verse two comes and Abraham is sitting in the shade of his tent, sun blaring down, he looks up and suddenly three men are in front of him. We know one of these guys is God himself. But it seems Abraham has no idea. That doesn't stop Abraham from jumping up and showing some good old ancient Middle Eastern hospitality.

He runs out to these wanderers and bows to them! He offers them enough water to wash their feet and a morsel of bread. But that's not what he brings them. Several loaves of warm baked bread. Tender juicy steaks. Something like cottage cheese and freshly milked milk. That food would have taken hours to prepare. During which time Abraham was able to entertain and talk with his guests. When food is finished and set before the guests, they eat. What incredible love is shown in those two words! God, the almighty maker of heaven and earth stoops down from all his glory to eat with one of his creatures. It's almost unthinkable. God ate with Abraham.

Only in verse 9 does Abraham get some kind of clue; these strangers aren't what they seem. "**Where is your wife Sarah?**" they ask. This tells Abraham 3 things. First, these guys must have had some real authority. Otherwise, it wasn't culturally appropriate to be asking where the lady of the house was. Two, Sarah's name had only recently been changed. Before that, she was called Sarai. How did these strangers know that? And lastly, this visit was about Sarah.

One of the men went on. "**I will return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.**" Now Abraham knew for sure, at the very least, these guys are some kinds of messengers of God.

Sarah, however, overhears this conversation and laughs. Her, have a child? Yeah right! When God first told Abraham he was going to have a son, Sarah was 65 years old. Now she was

99. A few years back she tried to provide Abraham a son by giving him her maidservant Hagar. But that just made a mess of things. Last year God had apparently told Abraham that actually, she herself was going to have the son. And now these guys show up and say the same thing. She had been waiting on God for almost 25 years. This whole thing was becoming a little too much for Sarah to believe.

But this stranger, the LORD, knew what Sarah was thinking. He knew where Sarah was. He wanted her to hear this message. Not only that, he knew where Sarah's faith was. He knew that what she was able to see—her aged decaying body—was distracting her from what God had promised. So God in his endless patience pays her a visit, he gently brings her back to reality. **“Is anything too hard for the Lord?”** He repeats himself one more time, reassuring her, **“I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.”**

What causes us to laugh at what God says? Maybe the reaction or emotion isn't exactly laughter. Maybe better verbs are “question”, “doubt”, “ignore”, “despair”. They all sprout from the same root cause, unbelief.

Inside all of us is a little unbeliever. That unbeliever in us whispers, “How can you believe the Bible. Look at all the fossils. Listen to all the scientists, the physicists, biologists, and doctors who say this took billions of years to happen. You're an idiot if you believe the Bible.” It murmurs to us, “There are so many religions out there, how can be sure yours is right above all the others?” It questions, “Really, you can't live with your boyfriend before you're married? What kind of antiquated socially backward book are you listening?” Satan loves when we think like this. It plays right into the oldest trick in his book. The one he used in the Garden of Eden. “Did God really say...?” With that question, he tries to crush us into despair. “Did God really say you're forgiven? Sure, God forgives some people, those who really believe what he says, those who listen to he says. But how can God forgive you? Look at what you've done. Think about what you've thought. God's love isn't for people like you.”

We have an all-powerful, all-loving God. Yet he stooped down to visit with Abraham. He came as a stranger to reassure Sarah and build her faith. 2000 years later God became man. Immanuel, God with us. Was born in a stable. Lived among us. Died for his creation. He knows where our faith is at. He knows how weak we are. He knows how we struggle to believe. So God comes with all his knowledge and with all his might to reassure us. You, yes, you are forgiven. You, I came to die for. You, I love.

Have you ever heard a child say something along the lines of, “Mom I can't do it, it's impossible!” Meanwhile what they're trying to do is something really easy like tie their shoe. So you lovingly bend over and tie their shoe in a couple of seconds and they just look at you in amazement.

There are lots of things God tells us that sound pretty impossible. Lots of things that sound too amazing to be true. But God bends down—maybe a twinkle in his eye—as he does the impossible for us. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. He uses all his power as a loving parent.

It's amazing. God comes down to visit with his creation. He comes not in anger but to build up our faith. He comes to reassure us. So listen to him!

After God calls out Sarah she did put her faith in his promise. We find out in Hebrews chapter 11, “And by faith, even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear

children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise.” When Sarah’s son was born she laughed again, but this time she laughed out of pure joy.

God came down and met with Sarah to combat her doubts. Jesus called out to Martha to break her out of her distractions. How does God combat our doubts? This may sound like the most redundant advice but hear me out. When you are struggling to listen to God go listen to God. Here’s what I mean. What do you do when you’re meeting someone but when you get to the meeting place, it looks nothing like you expect. You’re supposed to meet at a nice restaurant but the place you came to looks like an old gas station on an abandoned intersection. You probably check to make sure you have the address right. And when your friend is late, you probably double-check to make sure you got the meeting time right. When you’re doubting God’s promises, double-check them. Go check his Word.

God comes to us in his Word. He reassures us through his Word. God’s word Works. God’s word is powerful. He knows how weak humans are. So he comes to us again and again in multiple ways.

You can listen to his Word in your private study. Not because you have to, but because through his Word God gives you peace. Read through the whole Bible. There are plans to read the Bible in one two or three years. Read through large chunks at a time. Or read through small portions and give yourself time to meditate on one beautiful promise. If you wonder how to do it Martin Luther wrote a wonderful guide called, “A Simple Way to Pray.”

You can listen to God’s Word at church. This one is so important. It shows just how much God understands us and our needs. The whole service begins with a confession of our sins and then a proclamation from God: “You are forgiven!” We see so much that reminds us we are forgiven. The crosses all over the place. The right hand of God reaching down to us in the stained glass. The baptismal font that reminds us of when we became a child of God.

God doesn’t command us to God to church every Sunday, but he strongly encourages us to the same way your mom might strongly encourage you to eat breakfast every day. Here we get encouraged by fellow believers. We can be comforted knowing we’re not alone in our faith and we’re not alone in our struggles. When we sin they can remind us we are forgiven. Plus we get the privilege of encouraging others and reminding others they are forgiven.

Does it ever seem unfair? God appeared to Abraham like all the time. And all those believers who got to see and hear and eat with Jesus. When was the last time God appeared to you? Wouldn’t that make it so much easier to believe? Whenever we receive Jesus body and blood in the Lord’s Supper, Jesus is truly present. He is there encouraging us, forgiving us. All this happens at church.

There once was a young man who was deeply in love with his wife. She was the love of his life. He wanted her to know. How do you think he went telling her? By muttering once on their wedding day, “I love you dear.” and never mentioning it again? Of course not! He told her every day. He bought her flowers and chocolate. He took her out to dinner and bought her fancy jewelry. God wants you to know he loves you. He wants you to know you’re forgiven. So he comes to you in Word and Sacrament week after week.

Don’t be distracted from God’s word by what you see or feel at any given moment. Don’t be distracted from God’s word by your doubts. God wants to visit with you. He comes to reassure you. He comes to you again and again. Listen to him.

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy - to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power, and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forever more! Amen.