

3rd Sunday After Pentecost

[Genesis 18.1-15;](#)

[Psalm 116.1-2; 116.11-18;](#)

[Romans 5.1-11;](#)

[Matthew 9.35-10.8](#)

Rev'd Lauren Martin

Guarded Laughter

Today these readings meet us with a great deal of gentleness. They do not rush us. They do not scold us. They do not ask us to pretend that life is easier than it is. Instead, they meet us in places we know well: the place of waiting, the place of weariness, the place of unanswered prayer, the place where hope can feel both precious and a little frightening.

That is where we find Sarah in Genesis. She hears the promise that she will bear a son, and she laughs. It is not cruel laughter. It is not faithless laughter in the shallow sense. It is the laughter of someone who has carried disappointment for a very long time. It is the laughter of a person who has learned to protect her heart. Many of us know that kind of laughter. It is what rises in us when we have prayed for something for so long that we scarcely know how to pray for it anymore. It is what rises when we have been brave before, and being brave has hurt. It is what rises when life has taught us to be careful with hope.

And what is so beautiful in this story is that God does not turn away from Sarah. The promise is not withdrawn. She is not shamed for being tired. Instead, there comes that tender, searching question: "Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?" It is not a question meant to crush her. It is a question meant to open a window. It reminds Sarah—and us—that the future does not finally rest on the strength of our faith, but on the faithfulness of God. Sometimes that is exactly what weary people need to hear. Not that we must believe harder, but that God remains gracious even when our grip is weak.

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Psalm 116 speaks with that same tenderness. "I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice." There is such comfort in those words. We are heard. Our prayers, even when they are halting, even when they are little more than a sigh, are not lost to God. There are seasons when prayer feels strong and clear, and there are seasons when prayer is simply, "Lord, help." The psalm reminds us that both are prayers. Both are heard. Our lives are not invisible to heaven. Our grief is not beneath God's notice. Our weariness is not something we must hide. We are heard, and to be heard by God is already a kind of healing.

Then Paul gives us one of the most reassuring sentences in all of Scripture: "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Peace with God. Not uncertainty. Not distance. Not probation. Peace. Through Christ, we are welcomed, received, reconciled. And Paul says something even more tender: Christ died for us while we were still weak. That means God's love comes to us as we are, not as we wish we were. God does not wait for us to become stronger, calmer, or more put together before drawing near. Christ meets us in our weakness, and in that place, he makes peace.

That does not mean suffering is easy. Paul is not asking us to pretend that pain is a blessing in disguise. Some burdens are heavy. Some losses change us. Some sorrows remain tender for a very long time. But Paul does tell us that suffering is not the end of the story. In God's hands, even what wounds us need not have the final word. God can hold us through it. God can deepen us through it. God can draw hope from places where, by ourselves, we would only see sorrow. That hope is not forced cheerfulness. It is a quiet confidence that the love of God is stronger than all that threatens to undo us.

And then in the Gospel we see the heart of Jesus so clearly. He looks at the crowds and has compassion on them, because they are harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus sees people as they are. He sees their weariness, their confusion, their wounds, their longing. And he does not turn away. He is moved toward them in mercy. That matters, because it tells us what God is like. God is not cold toward the struggling. God is not impatient with the burdened. In Jesus, we see the compassion of God made visible.

And then Jesus sends his disciples to share that compassion. Not because they are perfect, but because they have been loved. That is still the church's calling. We are not asked to be dazzling. We are asked to be faithful. To notice one another. To pray for one another. To make room for

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the lonely. To speak gently in a harsh world. To carry hope to people who are tired. Sometimes the kingdom comes near in very simple ways: a visit, a meal, a listening ear, a word of encouragement, a quiet act of mercy. These things may seem small, but in the hands of Christ they are never small.

So perhaps this is the invitation for us today. If you are weary, bring that weariness to God. If you are disappointed, do not hide it. If your prayers feel thin, offer them anyway. If hope feels fragile, let God hold it for you. The Lord who met Sarah in her guarded laughter, who heard the psalmist's cry, who made peace while we were still weak, and who looked on the crowds with compassion, is the same Lord who meets us now.

So, hear the good news. You do not need to carry everything alone. You do not need to be stronger than you are. You do not need to have perfect faith. Christ is already near. Christ has made peace. Christ is full of compassion. And by grace, the laughter that once sounded like weariness may yet become the laughter of joy.

In the name of Christ. Amen.