

Proper 6A, 2017
Church of the Holy Trinity

Genealogy is all the rage in our time. Perhaps I should not say just in our time, since the Bible is full of genealogies. Long before the TV series “Roots,” people were hungry to learn about where they came from. We all love to hear the stories of our ancestors. Learning about them tells us things about ourselves, and we feel connected. Ever watch “Genealogy Road Show,” or “Finding Your Roots” on TV? People are touched at a very deep level by the stories of their family members. Events become more concrete to us when they have happened to members of our family. The Civil War became more real to me when I read my Great-grandfather’s diary, for example

When I was small, we would spend every Sunday afternoon visiting one or the other set of Grandparents—as I suspect is the case with many of you. My maternal Grandfather was a New Englander, and when we went to visit, the best thing was to sit in his lap and have him tell stories about his childhood. We learned about the squirrels that stored up nuts in his attic, and about how they had made maple sugar from the trees in their backyard. Grandpa never lost his New Hampshire accent, and it added to the exotic flavor of his stories. We never dreamed then that we would someday live in New England, ourselves. My Grandmother played the piano, just like generations of her family members had. And she would show us some of their pictures and mementos. We were fascinated by these stories about long ago and far away relatives, and marveled at the family resemblances between their faded pictures and our own faces. When I played the piano, I would think of all the musicians who had gone before me in my family.

The Bible is all about the family of God, of which we are members. So, the stories recorded there are our family stories. They show us our family resemblances and inheritance. Today I have brought you this icon of the three strangers visiting Abraham and Sarah in the

wilderness. You can think of it as a family photo. Bible stories show us how God has been an important part of our family story ever since the beginning.

The story of Abraham is the story of some of our earliest relatives. So what do we learn about our family roots when we read today's story? It is no surprise to us in the United States when we find that our ancestry begins in a far off country. All of us came from someplace else, if you go far enough back. So we find Abraham and Sarah lived in tents in a desert region of the Middle East. They had managed to locate their tents at an oasis where they had some oak trees for shade. They had some cattle. They practiced hospitality--it must have been lonely in the desert. Sarah was a good cook (although Abraham seemed to want to treat her as a Sous-chef.) And both of them were very old.

Abraham and Sarah had no children of their own, when our story begins, and they had long given up that hope. It was true that earlier, when they were much younger, God had promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation—of so many children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and so on that they would outnumber the stars in the sky. Abraham still remembered that God had said that to him, but it did not seem to be happening.

And then these three mysterious strangers had showed up. Right there in the middle of the desert at their oasis! To thank Abraham and Sarah for their wonderful hospitality, the strangers offered them a new promise: that upon their return trip Sarah would have a child, a son! Sarah was so amazed that she laughed. She simply could not help herself. It was very impolite, and she tried to deny it, but the idea that she and her ancient husband would be able to bear children was just too funny.

But then suddenly it seemed that those three strangers spoke in one voice: the voice of God! “Was anything too wonderful for God?” they asked. No one tried to answer that question, in the story!

And then it all happened just as they had said it would. Abraham and Sarah did indeed have a miraculous child in their old age, and they named him Isaac. By the time the baby was born his father was 100 years old! Sarah was still laughing, only now it was the kind of laughter that came from pure joy. Sarah predicted that everyone who would ever hear this story would laugh with her...and generations and generations later we still do. A baby at age 100? Aw c’mon! You’ve got to laugh. And our ancestor Sarah passed this question down to us: “Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children?”

Who, indeed? And yet it happened. And we are some of the generations that prove that it did.

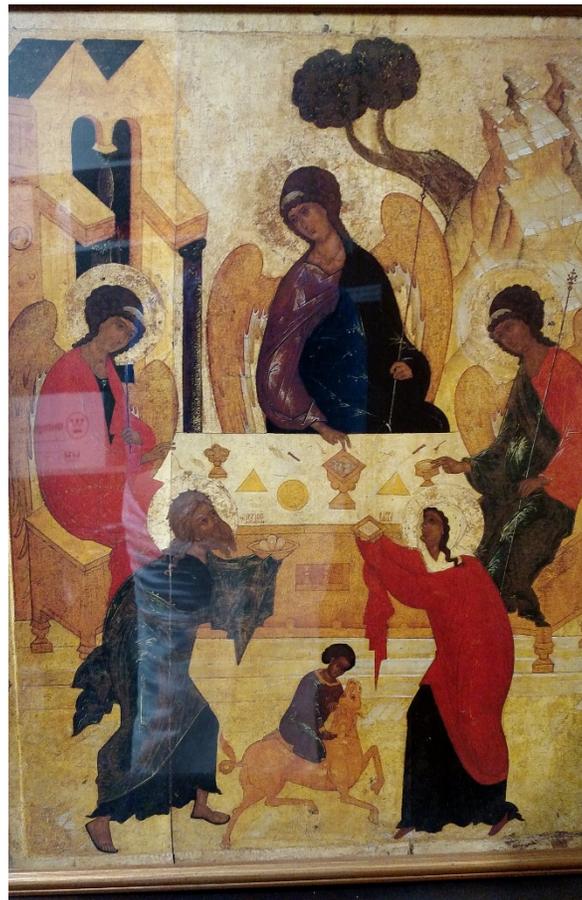
Knowing that we are related to Abraham and Sarah means that we have some skin in the game, here. We have a stake in their story. Their story is part of our story. And what can we learn for ourselves? We learn that God keeps promises. And we learn that perhaps God waits a bit on the fulfilment of those promises sometimes, so that there can be absolutely no doubt in our minds that it was God who was responsible. I’ll bet that Abraham and Sarah remembered God’s faithfulness every time they looked at Isaac. There was no question but that the continuation of their family tree was God’s work.

It was God’s work, and God must have had a big plan for Isaac, his children, and his children’s children, and so on, because it seemed VERY important to God that Isaac be born.

We have inherited this story. We are here as the result of God’s close relationship with our ancestors Abraham and Sarah. Their generations continue, so I think we can conclude that

God is still up to something here—something of which we are a part. And it may well be something we think is absolutely impossible. (Can you think of anything like that in your own life?) It may well be something which will be conveyed to us by absolute strangers, like those three visitors. And it may even make us laugh: “Who would ever have said to us that this seemingly impossible thing would happen?”

Who, indeed?



The Rev. Dana L. Campbell, Interim Rector