

Genesis 18:1-15

»A Son Promised to Abraham and Sarah«



The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said, 'My lord, if I find favour with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.' So they said, 'Do as you have said.' And Abraham hastened into the

tent to Sarah, and said, 'Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.' Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

They said to him, 'Where is your wife Sarah?' And he said, 'There, in the tent.' Then one said, 'I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.' And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?' The Lord said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh, and say, "Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?" Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.' But Sarah denied, saying, 'I did not laugh'; for she was afraid. He said, 'Oh yes, you did laugh.'

Dear congregation!

This visitation by God in the guise of three strangers is among the most obscure and intriguing stories in the Bible around Abraham's life. Extending hospitality to his three guests, Abraham prepares a feast. A famous Irish folk tale describes how God sometimes approaches and meets us in the guise of a stranger. It goes like this: "Yesterday I saw a stranger; I gave him bread and a drink; and in the Name of the Holy Trinity he blessed me and my home, my cattle and all my loved ones; and the lark sang: Often, yes often, Christ comes around in the shape of a stranger."

But if God is infinite is this kind of understanding even possible? Undoubtedly it would not be if we were left to our own speculations on how the infinite God might be. Fortunately, God has spoken to us through

the process of revelation and has revealed himself in various ways that are comparable with our experience. And incredibly, God does this not just to simply communicate information to us, but to engage in relationship with us! This is essentially what we celebrate today on Holy Trinity Sunday – that God is a relationship within Godself and that this same God seeks to be in relationship with us. God is a personal God and meets you where you are! The story of the three strange guests meeting Abraham at his tent in the desert is the story of a personal, caring and loving God that comes to meet us where we are. This divine truth of a personal God that comes to meet us where we are ultimately takes shape in the person of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. But it was wonderful for me to also discover God in the form of three persons in the Old Testament.

Even right at the beginning of Genesis there is already proof of the Trinity where in Genesis 1:26 God says: "Let **us** make humankind in **our** image, according to **our** likeness. So God created humankind, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." Indeed then, why wouldn't God meet us in the shape of those that were created in God's image?

In fact, the whole biblical witness presents us with a rich picture of God's accommodation. This word comes from a Latin root that refers to the process of fitting one thing into another. The story of the three strangers meeting Abraham at his tent in the afternoon is only possible because of God's accommodation, since God transcends space and time. Jesus's accommodation is even more radical, for his accommodation began at the incarnation two thousand years ago when the Son of God entered our space and time. Jesus said of himself, "Before Abraham was born, I am." With that in mind, we can see that Jesus is not merely stooping down to interact with humankind *as if* he were a human person, because *he really is!* That is deep accommodation!

By sharing a meal together Abraham experiences real intimacy with God and once again discovers that God is a loving and patient God that reaffirms His love and His promise. The Lord is encouraging Abraham with His presence and friendship. Accommodation comes in other surprising ways, including through one's stomach! Throughout the late afternoon Abraham and the three guests share a wonderful meal, partaking together in the tasty food that was prepared. (If you're wondering why Sarah didn't partake in this meal, it is because the oriental culture at that time did not allow women to dine with men!) Fortunately, we know that Jesus turned this exclusive culture on its head when he dined with all sorts of people at their house including women! But since God is spirit, God does not need to eat, right? So why did Jesus, and also these three guests pack away all those unnecessary calories? Again, the point is not the food but the

relationship. Jesus and God in these three guests ate with humans simply as another way to be with them. I can imagine God saying: "Well, you need to eat, so what better excuse to be together?" God accommodates His infinite being by coming down to our level and entering the human experience through the communal sharing of food.

Jesus illustrated this Divine truth, this deep love that God has for us, and this deep longing to be with us by establishing a lasting communal sharing with us through Holy Communion. There He shared not only food with them, but his very self, a celebration of God's Love that lasted up to this very day, a celebration of God's Love that will never end.

Today we celebrate a personal God who wants to meet us where we are at. We are accompanied by this beautiful story of encountering, sharing, eating, drinking, even laughing as a familiar way in which God wants to meet us personally and intimately. Sarah gives us permission to worship God with our laughter when our future is uncertain. In face of the incredulity of God's promises as we wait and wait, she offers comic relief. Up to this point the whole Abraham story of faith and obedience has been serious business. But here at a leisurely tent-side meal in the company of a God we can barely recognize, we are invited to laugh. Sarah will in due time, against all the odds, bear a son, and she will name him Isaac, which means "Laughter".

What a beautiful Story! We learn that God can meet us even through the simple act of sharing a meal and we recognize that when it comes to God and the ways He accommodates Himself to meet us there is no "one size fits all". So how far do you think God will go to meet you in the midst of your suffering? The bleeding God hanging on the Cross in Jesus Christ suggests that it is much farther than you could ever have imagined!

Amen.