

Trinity 6 (2020)

When Jimmy Carter was President, on occasion, he would spend the night at the homes of ordinary Americans.

He did so out of a desire to stay in touch with the citizens of this great nation . . . to hear what they were thinking and saying . . . to demonstrate he was one with them.

Having the President of the United States show up on your door step with suitcase in hand must have been a pretty daunting affair.

But, how much more if the LORD GOD ALMIGHTY and several angels came calling.

What would you do?

Your first thought might well be: What am I going to feed them?

Or: Is the bathroom clean? Are there fresh towels on the rack?

Or even: Do I have any magazines lying around that might be embarrassing?

Well, this in fact did happened to the patriarch Abraham and his wife Sarah, as we have just heard in this morning's Old Testament reading. But, how did they respond?

Well, by going into high gear and getting a meal fit for such exalted personages on the table, or, perhaps in their case, on a tablecloth on the ground outside their tent.

There were, you see, no Harvest on Main, no Black Sheep, no Toccoa River restaurant to which to take them. So, they did what they could and as fast as they could. ///

For the past few weeks our Old Testament readings have been taking us through the life of Abraham.

We have looked at his call in the Ur of the Chaldees; at his journey first to Haran and then onto Canaan; at God's promise to him of an heir; and last week at God changing his name from Abram to Abraham.

Today, we come to a new episode in his life: a visit from these three mysterious strangers.

I dare say that this is one of the most puzzling passages in the Bible, because, as I have already mentioned, One of these three is identified with the LORD.

By the way, whenever you see L-O-R-D in all caps in your Bible be aware that the word being translated is **Yahweh**, the most sacred name for God. That is the case in verse 1 of today's reading:

“And the LORD appeared unto [Abraham] in the plains of Mamre.”

Some commentators have suggested that the One with whom Abraham spoke and ate was none other than the pre-incarnate Christ, Jesus before Bethlehem.

It makes sense. After all, St. John in his prologue, writes:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.”

There was never a time when the Son of God was not. So, why should we be surprised at an early manifestation of Him? ///

With that introduction, there are a number of applications we can draw from this reading. One of the most obvious being the importance of hospitality. Indeed, the writer of Hebrews picks up on this one and tells early members of the Christian community:

“Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”

But that in fact is not the theme or focus I have chosen for this morning. It is rather: **“People of Warts: God of Power”**.

What do I mean by these words?

Well, have you ever seen any of those old TV Westerns where you know immediately who the good guys are and who are the bad?

The good wear white hats, the bad black.

Would that life were that simple?

Someone has said:

“There is so much good in the worst of us and so much bad in the best of us that it behoves us not to talk about the rest of us.”

No doubt there is a lot of truth in that saying. We all have warts, yes, even those that the Bible holds up as heroes of the faith, including Abraham and Sarah.

Abraham, you might remember, lied about the identity of his wife when the couple went down to Egypt during a famine. Instead of presenting her as his wife, he presented her as his sister.

And in today’s passage Sarah seems to have had a momentary lapse of faith. Listening through the tent door, she laughs when this mysterious Visitor says she is going to conceive and have a baby.

And, when confronted with it, she lies, saying: “I laughed not.”

So, what is my point? /// It is this:

God does not let *our* imperfections, *our* lapses of faith, *our* warts, stand in the way of bringing about His purposes of good.

Our faithlessness is no match for His faithfulness. His power is greater than all our sins.

Towards the end of today’s passage, we find the divine Messenger asking: **“Is anything too hard for God?”**

This question does not get answered with words. But it does get answered.

Initially, it gets answered around a year later when Sarah does in fact give Abraham an heir. The boy’s name was Isaac. He was the son of promise and bearer of the Covenant.

But, the great crescendo comes 2000 year later when God the Father raises Jesus Christ from the dead.

After that, everything else is small potatoes. We've been given our answer.

More than that, the God who raises the dead is still in the business doing the 'impossible'.

Case in point in the New Testament: Saul the persecutor of Christians becomes Paul the proclaimer of the Good News.

A more recent example is a man I know personally. His name is Thomas Tarrants.

Back in the 1960s, he was a Klan terrorist and almost died when he was fired upon by the FBI while planting dynamite under the bedroom window of a Jewish business man in Meridian, Mississippi. /// He is now the President Emeritus of the C.S. Lewis Society in Washington, DC, and a champion of racial reconciliation.

The title of his newest book says it all: "Consumed by Hate: Redeemed by Love".

Is anything too hard for God? Tom Tarrants would answer, no.

The late television evangelist Robert Schuler was fond of saying: **"God can turn scares into stars."**

And so, He can.

That is the message I want to leave with you this morning.

Why not turn over to Him *your* scars . . . or perhaps I should say 'warts' . . . and let Him do that in your life.