

Sermon: Open the door to God!  
2 Pentecost, Year A  
Genesis 18:1-15; 21:1-7

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On this Father's Day, we have a reading from Genesis, about Father Abraham, patriarch to three of the largest world religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Apparently, Abraham is just sitting at the entrance of his tent not doing much in the heat of the day when three mysterious visitors show up. Maybe he is feeling bored or lonely because when he sees them he *runs* to meet them and gushes offers of hospitality – let me bring you a little water for your feet, let me bring a little bread, rest under this tree. He's all a flutter! Notice the language; he *runs*, he *hastens*, he asks Sarah to *quickly* make some food. And why is he in such a hurry?

In the desert, hospitality toward travelers is critically important, often a matter of life and death, so maybe that is the reason for Abraham's sense of urgency. Or maybe he is wondering just who these three strangers are and his unease has him moving a little more quickly than usual. We don't know when Abraham figures out these strangers are God. And God in his infinite ability to be strange (why are you so strange, dear God?) seems to morph throughout the passage. Is this three men, and if so, which one is God and if one is God then who are these other two mystery men? (This group is sometimes referred to as the Old Testament Trinity; an icon image was on the cover of last Sunday's Trinity Sunday bulletin. ) Well, at some point we can only imagine that Abraham must have said to himself, "Oh, my God! It's GOD out there sittin' under that tree!"

Abraham was hospitable. He made room for the travelers, extended hospitality to strangers and was certainly blessed by them. When he opened the door (or tent flap) to God the picture of his future changed along with it. God told Abraham that Sarah, in her old age, was going to have a baby. And when she eavesdropped on that intimate conversation, she laughed. And why wouldn't she laugh? The text tells us she and Abraham were, and she was past child bearing years. While she was happy to make her guests some dinner, she had a hard time taking her guests seriously when it came to her future motherhood. She thought they were pretty hilarious. Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did she laugh?" And Sarah denied it, "I didn't laugh!" and the Lord said, "Oh yes, you did so laugh!" Perhaps Sarah's hospitality to their physical needs was well offered but her welcoming this strange news into her mind and heart took some time.

God shows up at unexpected ways and times and often surprises us. And yet, Abraham's and Sarah's encounter with this Trinity reminds us that God sees fit to visit us! And when we open ourselves up to the presence of God, we are offered a way forward beyond our limited view of the future. When we make room for the Divine Presence, God gives shape to possibilities when life seems hopeless.

What is currently residing in our own hearts and minds? This past week, we added several more stories of violence to our chronicle of violence in the world. A man went on a rampage at the congressional baseball practice, shooting a congressman and four others; on the other end of the country, on the same day, a disgruntled UPS worker shot and killed four co-workers. And we had a drug deal shooting right here in Staunton.

What about the violence within our own hearts and minds? Have we made too much space for hatred and disdain? What would it look like to be more receptive to God, to be hospitable to love and peace? Our Romans passage says that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." Are we ready, like Abraham and eventually Sarah to welcome God into our home, allowing God to rearrange the furniture in our dwelling places, that love may occupy the entire house of our being? Violence has no place in God's kingdom.

Leonard Bernstein, the great musician once said, "This will be our reply to violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before." So, as our response to violence and to be hospitable to God, can we not *love* more intensely, *love* more beautifully and *love* more devotedly than ever before?

This week some of our members will be traveling to Haiti: Dan Lynn and Allan Hadfield will be going with the Rev. Roger Bowen and several others from the Haiti Collaborative on behalf of all of us. So to you three I want to say, No doubt, the Haitian people will be extending hospitality to you, and you will be the strangers and in a way you will be in a desert, a country with few tangible resources. You will depend on your hosts to get you through this journey. May God's love and peace so fill your being that you will be able to bless those who are in your path with love and peace. And may that hospitality go both ways, that you can find your hearts and minds enlarged and, as Roger often says, that your souls may be scrubbed.

Whether we are in Haiti or in our own homes, when we invite our strange and mysterious God into our lives, we will often see the possibilities of our future expanded. When we offer hospitality to the Divine, love grows in us. So, as Abraham and Sarah did, open the door (or the tent flap). And hurry up about it! No time to delay. Let love grow.

Amen.