**New Kilpatrick**

**YouTube**

**Genesis 18:1-15**

**24th July 2022**

**Gathering**

He was the first of strangers

And thus hosted every stranger

There in the desert

In the heat of the day

Three travellers appeared through the haze

A feast was fixed

By the hand of Sarah

A sheep slaughtered

By the hand of a servant

But only Abraham

Enjoyed the credit

Becoming the model

Of sacred hospitality

So, my friends

This place is your own

This time, your time

These words

Not just a welcome

But an invitation

To be guest and friend

Of this community

Hello, I’m Roddy Hamilton, the minister of New Kilpatrick Parish… and yes, please, may it be that you feel welcomed, and invited, as we do towards you, and shape a space here, for the encounter of grace, renewal and love… let us worship…

**Prayer**

Great God

Welcome of heaven

Host of the table

Thank you for our place here

Within you’re community

May we be reshaped by its peace

Renewed by its grace

Reborn in its love

For such gifts of yours

Bring us back to life

And we need that life

That renewal

That rebirth

In the generosity of your love

May we welcome each other

May that be our worship space

And may we find you

As we seek each other

And widen this space of love

And justice

And grace

To celebrate every stranger as guest

Growing the kingdom

One welcome at a time

Loving God

May we lay down here

The barriers we create

The prejudices that hide our fear

The language that hides our prejudices

And the masks that hide our language

May we always find ways to be kingdom people

With daring use of hospitality

And excessive amounts of generosity

In such a place as this

May our eyes be open

And our hearts beat

To a different rhythm

In time to the heartbeat of the kingdom

Loving God

Hear us

As we listen to you

(Pause)

Let us join together in the global prayer

**Scripture Introduction**

We visit a well known story today… continuing our journey with Abraham… We are at Mamre… the oaks thereof… and for the fourth time Abraham is given the promise… You’d have through by now… to hear this promise again… it becomes less and less believable… A promise never delivered…

But this time… Sarah also hears… not that she is meant to… but she is eave’s dropping… lurking behind the fold of the tent… and what she hears is a surprise… and for the second time in as many weeks… there is laughter…

**Scripture**

The Lord appeared to Abraham[a] by the oaks[b] of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. **2**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. **3**He said, ‘My lord, if I find favour with you, do not pass by your servant. **4**Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. **5**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.’ **6**And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, ‘Make ready quickly three measures[c] of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.’ **7**Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. **8**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.

**9**They said to him, ‘Where is your wife Sarah?’ And he said, ‘There, in the tent.’ **10**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. **11**Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. **12**So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, ‘After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?’ **13**The Lord said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh, and say, “Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?” **14**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.’ **15**But Sarah denied, saying, ‘I did not laugh’; for she was afraid. He said, ‘Oh yes, you did laugh.’

**Appendix**

Here the oaks of Mamre becomes the tree of life… the seed is finally planted… the date set… the promise is unfolding… and the wait soon to be over… It seems indeed that nothing is too wonderful for God…

He was the first of strangers

And hosted any stranger after him

There in the desert

In the heart of the day

Three appeared through the haze

And Abraham welcomed them

But I was the one who baked the cakes

Supervised the roast

Organised the servants

Made sure there was enough

That my husband would get a good name

But I never tasted the meal

There were no tidbits for me

Except one

Heard while I stood behind the tent flap

Where else was I to hear the gossip

Of news across the desert?  
How else was I to help my husband

Make the decisions he needed to make

Without knowing the stories

Passed on by strangers that visited

But this news

Was the most peculiar

Of a son born

It was ridiculous

Given how dry and moribund

I am

Such men and their reasoning:

Easy belief,

When they don’t have to carry the hope.

Rather, just demand it.

Ha

Haha.

I laugh because

They just don’t understand.

**Reflection**

Last week we found ourselves in comedy central with God and Abraham having a good laugh about his prospective fatherhood… and the ridiculousness of it… It is like the two of them having a bit of a lad’s night out… joking at things they know little about and have little responsibility for, let alone investment in… childbirth…

Let me rewind a little… last week… Abraham was… for the fourth time… given a promise… 25 years he’s been waiting for its fulfilment… At 75 years… he was already too old… now as a centenarian… it was ridiculous…

And the patriarch and the almighty… were having a good chuckle about this… with God nudging Abraham… with a wink and saying… It’s okay old man… nothing is impossible for me…

Then this second story of laughter… but it is not quite the same… This time it is Sarah’s turn to laugh… but it is of a different quality… so much so… God complains to Abraham… about the attitude Sarah has towards this good news of a son…

Can we pause there… and take our male ears off… and put on female ears… because the story is quite different… and not that funny…

Hospitality was the link between humanity and God… the stranger always welcome… the alien always a guest… and when Abraham spies the three visitors… they are welcomed… humbly so… with a little water… and a little bread… And Abraham charges off… like any 99 year old… and finds 90 year old Sarah and instructs her to bake cake…

Then off he goes to the flock and has one of his servants slaughter an animal… and the guests receive a generous and fulsome meal… and Abraham… no one else… Abraham… who has done very little… Abraham is praised for his generosity… and becomes a model in the bible of hospitality…

But behind the scenes there is a plethora of others actually making the meal… including Sarah… who finds herself listening in to the after dinner conversation… and arrives at the point Abraham… yet again… hears the promise God has given… of a child…

Now… imagine what she feels when she realises they are talking about her… The three guests announce Sarah will have a child… without any reference or consent for her… Now remember the story tells us… in order to prove how nothing indeed is impossible with God… that she is 90… long past child bearing age…

And we imagine this scene with Sarah being overjoyed by this news… Even today it is dangerous enough to bear a child… and it was certainly far more dangerous in a young woman then… but almost unthinkable in older women… so would Sarah have felt as overjoyed as the three men and Abraham seem to think should ought to have been…

Her laughter… rightly… was the… ‘for goodness sake’ kind… the ‘that’s never going to happen’ kind… the ‘that’s what you think’ kind… Indeed… this is the first time Sarah has directly heard this promise that was going to affect her and her wellbeing…

The story is there to emphasis nothing is too wonderful for God… But Sarah's reaction perhaps grounds us in the fact that what is ‘too wonderful’… may not be what is best for everyone… and especially Sarah…

And does any of that strike a cord in today’s world… when decisions and laws and rules are made concerning one group of people… by another group who do not have to experience the consequences of those rules…

This interpretation opens up a well known story… and invites us to question… who do we leave on the sidelines… for whom do we make decisions without any input from them?…

Without their voices we continue to let a privileged few assume they know best… from abortion laws to party-gate… and many more besides… and from which the church is certainly not omitted…

I don’t know how to redeem this particular story… and my apologies if I’ve ruined it for anyone… other than to say… the Bible is not single minded on this… there are a bundle of stories that speak of gracious… generous… loving encounters with those too often marginalised still in the world… from the gyro phonesian woman to Jarius’ daughter…

Let this story serve as the corrective it needs to be… as we let the kingdom take root in a reimagined church… and find laughter in the possibilities… such an inclusive church could create…

**News**

**Prayer for Others**

Loving God

May we make space for all

In our prayers

A generous space

An affirming space

A hospitable space

Where words speak of love

And grace

And hope

Big enough for all

May our prayers be big enough

Our vision large enough

Our hope broad enough

To speak for the kingdom

And so we bring our nation

And the bundle of crisis we are experiencing

From government to cost of living

From faith in the future to caring for neighbours

May we pray big enough

We bring all conflict

And the lack of trust of one another

From Ukraine to China

Syria to Russia

May we pray big enough

We bring our environment

Hit by fast moving climate change

And those whose land is no use now

And those whose houses have burned

And those whose futures are so uncertain

May we pray big enough

We bring pandemics and recovery

Across countries

In the west and the south

And the inequality of recovery

May we pray big enough

We bring our local neighbourhood

And the hope we have together

Towards community

And into life

May we pray big enough

We bring families and friends

Those who are coping, just

Those anxious and worried

Those physically and mentally unwell

May we pray big enough

Hear us

So be it

Amen

**Benediction**