

Table 2:

Sharing Together

Genesis 18:1-15

Nick Larson and Terry Overfelt

Broadway Christian Church

June 17, 2018

Terry: In the spirit of sharing, Nick and I decided to collaborate this teaching moment for table and scripture.

Nick: WE want to begin this morning with a fresh insight offering us rich capacities and illustrations in our shared faith and lives from The RevGalBlogPals.

Terry: He had me at RevGal.

Terry: When the day ends and he settles down in his tent and looks up at the night sky,

Nick: The expanse of the stars reminds Abraham of God's promise to make him the father of children so numerous they are like the stars in the sky.

Terry: Can you count the stars, God asks Abraham? (15:5) Your descendants will be that numerous. God has promised.

Nick: But with the tent quiet, and the wrinkles apparent on Sarah's face, are the stars a sign of hope to Abraham? An aggravating reminder of what God hasn't done yet? A painful prick of a once cherished dream of laughing children all around him?

***Terry: As this story opens, twenty-four years have gone by since God first made that promise to Abraham who is now 99.
(RevGalBlogPals)***

Nick: It is the heat of the day when Abraham sees three people standing near the opening of his tent where he sits by the oaks of the Mamre.

THE OAKS have remained to be a gathering place for generations. Abraham and Sarah, Issac and Rebecca, and Jacob and Leah; the ancestors of both the Jewish, Muslim and Christian traditions. Children of Abraham, all are we!

Terry: The poetry of the oaks themselves associates us with or the long life of Abraham. Even today one such tree stands near Hebron that is thought to be over 850 years old and is called **Abraham's Oak or the Tree of Rest.**



IMAGE

INBETWEEN

Nick: Abraham lives out of a tent and in-between places have been his homes; Promise and Reality, Homeland and Promised Land, Folly and Fatherhood. He was first called out of his homeland when he was **70**. He has been called by God 24 years ago to be the father of the Hebrew nations.

Happy Father's Day!

Yet to this day, there has been no child born to him and Sarah. God has a pattern of waiting until it seems humanly impossible to imagine and then makes it so, so we will know that it was only by the power of holiness. Abraham waited at the table, cultivating patience and trust. Saying grace Abraham sustained hopeful, even joyful witness.



IMAGE

FERTILITY

Terry: In ancient near-eastern culture and religion, a person's immortality was centered in what and who they contributed to the world as their legacy after they had gone. This was their resurrection. It was important. Status was established through children. But not so here with Abraham and Sarah. Sixteen years after the original promise to Abraham, Sarah offered Hagar, her servant girl, to get this birth of nations thing going since she was apparently unable to have a child. Like all of us, they wondered what their role was in this partnering with God who was silent. Abraham had a son, Ishmael, with Hagar when he is 86. They thought they had done it. Abraham and Sarah were a team.

He even said God could fulfill the promise now starting with Ishmael. But we know that God then said that the ***nation- building- promised- son*** would come from Sarah and God even named the future child, Isaac.

Then, in this sixteenth year of waiting, did God made a sort of *fertility* covenant? It is interesting that God renewed the covenant with Abraham with an *outward* sign of circumcision. But... that's a speculation for another day.

LAUGHTER

Nick, Meanwhile, 86 year old Abraham laughed, actually fell on his face laughing at this unlikelihood. Even the name assigned to this future child means laughter. This story is filled with rare exhibitions of laughter. Sarah laughed at the announcement that the **due time** will come, and she was still laughing when she named her baby, Isaac; meaning laughter. We can't all muster up laughter when we experience years of brokenness, longing and devastation, yet in these two, we witness them dealing with disappointment and moving on through life faithful to God. We can't help but know that this is an important part of this extraordinary story.

Abraham and Sarah might have been losing sight of this promise in the seeming impossibility at 90 and 99, when God reaffirmed the promise that Abraham's offspring would number as the stars! Time was running out. Sarah's brow was wrinkled and Abraham knew the painful prick of what was once a cherished dream.

RUN

Terry: So outside of his tent on this day, Abraham sees three visitors nearby. His feet know it before his mind does and he starts running. Remember he is 99 and the man is running... to them, tells them to take off their shoes and wash their feet. He hastens to Sarah and tells her to quickly bake the cakes. He runs to ready a calf with a servant. He runs to get milk and curds and he runs back to the table where the three have been seated. He serves and watches them. He knows. He knows it is the fulfillment of a promise. When you know, you know!

The three angelic visitors represent the triune nature of God the Creator, Christ the Son and the Holy Spirit. Abraham sees holiness and invites it to his table.



Image

THE TRINITY

Nick: As they are eating they call Sarah by name and ask where she is... *These are no strangers.* Sarah is hiding behind Abraham, listening in and when the **Holy Spirit** messenger says in *due time* she will return for the birth of Sarah's son, Sarah laughs. The second messenger, let's say **Christ**, calls Sarah out asking, "Why did she laugh? Is anything impossible for God?" And Sarah denies laughing and the all-seeing **God** messenger calls her on this denial, "Oh yes you did laugh." And within the year, Isaac is born to Sarah and Abraham. From him come the nations of Israel, even kings, and can't you just imagine the Christ Messenger joking a bit, pointing to himself (spoiler alert) while the God messenger's eyes widen in warning?

THESIS:

Terry: This is the kind of experience we are to have at our tables.

Nick: The kind that gathers us together to share the fullness of our stories retold,

Terry: the depth of our questions and dreams

Nick: and the unfolding truth and goodness of our lives to come.

STORIES

Terry: When we come into this place, the church, and gather around this table, we share stories. For us today, this is the one about how God was to number the descendants of Abraham and Sarah as the stars. It is about promises kept and faithfulness and laughter with God. When Jesus gathered his disciples around the tables, he was modeling *meals* as the perfect time and place for us to remember the stories.

Nick: On the Sunday following our winter College Mission Trip to Chicago a few years ago, I was contentedly exhausted. I was presiding in worship at this table. As I held up the bread, I saw instead, the soup bowl I had held up to a homeless

person in the kitchen line. There in that instant, three stories met and in a transcendent moment, I was overcome with emotion. I felt God was thanking me, inviting me, and in me, making the invitation to others. This will forever be one of my favorite stories to retell about the table.

DREAMS

Terry: When we come into this place, our church, and gather around this table, we hear again the depth of our dreams. The Gospel of Matthew 19:26 repeats the message of salvation by the power of God in the words of Jesus: "With humans this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving... Jesus is looking wishfully and earnestly at them, signifying that he knew their human reasoning.

We have come to this table with offerings of our questions and our dreams and look to the stars wishfully and earnestly.

What questions are being asked in your dreaming? What gnawing question will not go away because it hasn't been rightly answered? These are our dreams and the questions are nudging us forward.

We have visions where we have celebrated and clung to the faith that asks the laughing Sarah, "Is anything too difficult for God?"

Nick: We remember Abraham's dream of living on through his descendants.

Terry: We have come to this table to remember the resurrecting power that comes even after death.

Nick: We have collective and individual dreams and Jesus is looking at us wishfully and earnestly. Will we know, that we will absolutely come through? That ultimately the will of God is what shakes out? Nothing is impossible.

Terry: Seek our dreams here at the table of love that affirms us and them. Speak your dream as a person of faith who is fearfully and wonderfully made. (Psalm 139:14)

Nick: Under the stars at camp, the eighth grade messenger knew..."God has brought me here, to this table, where I am fed and affirmed in this camp week." This year I watched a first time camper read aloud the very words from Psalm 139, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." And we could see it on her face, the question went away... when you know, you know...she **was wonderfully made**, and she wore it. God makes beautiful things out of dust like us. For this camper, a

promise is made, will be retold and a nation is being made out of her.

LIVES

Nick: When we come into this place, Christ's church, and gather around this table we share the unfolding goodness our lives. This is the table where the truth of our lives is not and cannot be hidden. This is the place where the Messenger sets us straight, unafraid of our own doubts or reactions and loves us even though we denied that we laughed. The Holy Spirit, our advocate, meets us at the table where there can be no deception, where we encounter absolute understanding of how to help us proceed. This is the place where fear meets truth, at the table. It is important to get here (church motion).

Terry: When our children were little, I sold cosmetics for extra income. These appointments were most often at night. One evening meal, as we sat down for supper, four year old Dustin asked, "Mommy, why are you here?" Time stood still in that little face. Sometimes, I have heard the Holy Spirit whisper, "Listen now." From that time forward, we guarded meal times. Even as the schedules juggled games, plays, practices and events, we tried to find the 30 minutes to eat together each night, be it early or late. And it wasn't always easy. Some meals were pretty stressful and tense; a squeeze play. Occasionally we wondered if it was worth it to carve out the time when we were tired, cranky and stressed. But then we would take hands, sing grace together, and ask the best parts of our day. This is where the stories fleshed out. This is where the dreams were spoken. This is where the struggles became apparent in the eyes across the table and the strategies for coping with and celebrating life together unfolded, at the table.

Nick: There is fresh insight at this table, waiting for you. The fullness of our stories, the depth of our dreams and the truth of our lives are spread out on this table.

Terry: What has been too long in coming? Believe in the promise of God as you wish on the stars.

Nick: Invite the trinity of holiness to sit at your table.
Enter into the common, communing heart.

Terry: And then, Run! Nick: Amen? Terry: Amen!