



Promises at the crossroads of history and hope

Sarah

Warm-up Question

When was a time when you had an unfulfilled dream?



Photo by [William Bayreuther](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Discussion Questions

1. What do you see in this image?
2. What do you feel looking at this image?
3. What stories from your own life does this image bring to mind?
4. What stories of the world does this image bring to mind?

God Declares and Delivers

Primary Reading: [Genesis 18:1-15](#);

Secondary Readings: [Genesis 17:15-22](#); [21:1-7](#)

Bible Story Reflection

**A story of infertility, Sarah's story may be painful for some. This story must be engaged with pastoral care, sensitivity, and understanding.*

Dreams – we all have them. They are the hopes, the wishes, the imaginations of our lives. Sometimes our dreams come to fruition in exactly the way that we want or anticipate. Other times, our dreams take detours that we do not expect, but that we can navigate relatively well. And at still other times, our dreams remain so altered or unfulfilled that they remain simply that – dreams.

Sarah's story is marked by a dream – first unrealized, then delayed, then promised by God, and finally divinely delivered. When we first meet Abram and Sarai, they are already advanced in years. As the story progresses after God's call and promise of blessing, they continue to age, time continues to pass, and still the dream of a child born to both of them remains unrealized, unfulfilled.

It is no wonder, then, that Sarai follows the customs of her time and gives her slave, Hagar to Abram so that their dream of a child might be fulfilled. Because this custom is not a part of our societal practices today, it is easy for us to look askance at Sarai's suggestion and Abram's actions; however, it was an acceptable practice in their world. Furthermore, God's original promise to Abram did not indicate who the mother of Abram's many descendants would be, only that God would make of him a great nation (Genesis 12:1), and that Abram would have as many descendants as the stars of the heavens (Genesis 15:5).

As the story moves forward, however, God speaks to Abram again, changes Sarai's name to Sarah, and God declares that God's promise is to be fulfilled through her. She is to be the mother of the son through whom the covenant will be established. (Genesis 17:15-19). Sarah's dream of a child is now clearly God's dream, too. Because Sarah is too old to conceive a child, her story, her history, intersects with her hope, hinging completely on the promises of God.

It is no wonder that she laughs at both the promise and the fulfillment. It is no wonder that she guards Isaac with a jealousy that both protects him and sends Hagar and Ishmael away.

In many ways, Sarah's story becomes a type of every person from every time and every place. All that is empty and unfulfilled in our lives and the life of the world becomes threaded through our history; the Word of God – declared and delivered – is our hope. At this crossroads we dwell.

Discussion Questions

1. What speaks to you in Sarah's story?
2. How does Sarah's story provide a different perspective on some of the same events and experiences from Hagar's story?
3. How do you think Sarah would tell her own story?
4. God changes God's name when God declares that Sarah is to be the mother of the promised child. What does it mean to you that God names you "child of God?"
5. What do you make of Sarah laughing at the news she is to conceive?
6. How does Sarah's story shed insight onto inter-religious relationships and dialogue in the three Abrahamic faiths?
7. Our dreams are not always fulfilled by God like Sarah's were. What does this mean for us?
8. When the promise is spoken and Sarah overhears, the Lord says, "Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?" What does this mean for you? What does this mean for the world?
9. The birth of Isaac marks a clear intersection of history and hope in the promises of God. Talk about a time when your history and your hope intersected in God's promises.
10. To what are you being called through Sarah's story?
11. To what is your congregation or faith community being called through Sarah's story?

Activity Suggestions

Look at this image of Sarah.

What do you see?

What do you feel?

What does it communicate?

What stories or experiences from your life does it bring to mind?

If you are with a group, discuss. If you are by yourself, spend some time in reflection at this image of Sarah.



Tiepolo, Giovanni Battista, 1696-1770. Sarah laughing, detail from "Angel Appears to Sarah", from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=55120> [retrieved December 23, 2023]. Original source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giovanni_Battista_Tiepolo_065.jpg.

[Laughter](#) has been proven to reduce stress, lower blood pressure, and create a more positive outlook on life. It doesn't matter if laughter is spontaneous, or if it is practiced. So, laugh! Set a timer for 30 seconds, and laugh out loud! Be careful: before you know it, you just might be laughing for real. 😊 If you are in a group, laugh together, and then talk about what the experience was like.

Think of someone in your life who could use some joy. Make a plan to bring joy to their life, and then do it.

For young children: Adapt the laughter exercise above. Read Psalm 100. God invites us to make a joyful noise. Talk about what makes laughter a joyful noise. Talk about other ways that we can make a joyful noise. Close the exercise with this blessing. Have the children “repeat after me.” *God, the Creator of the universe, delights in me. I bring God joy. God brings me joy. God blesses me with laughter. In the name of +Jesus. Amen.*

Prayer Concerns

Those struggling with infertility, those who have miscarried, midwives and doctors who deliver babies, those with unfulfilled dreams, those who are not experiencing joy or laughter

Closing Prayer

Speak your Word of promise to me, O God, and bring it to fulfillment in my life. In the name of +Jesus, Amen.

