

## **“Verbs” – June 14, 2020 – Pastor Donna Doult**

While preparing for the opening of our churches last week, I experienced a sense of excitement and yearning to come back together with all of you. I felt like it was a family reunion. In a way it was. It was our congregational family reunion.

Even though we regathered in a difficult week, between the rioting and the pandemic, with some people choosing to remain distanced from the rest of us for their own health concerns, I was so very glad to see your smiling faces. I pray that others will feel more confident as the weeks go by and return to this sanctuary.

How many of you remember “Schoolhouse Rock,” back in the 70’s and 80’s? Remember those great hits like “Conjunction Junction” and “I’m Just a Bill on Capitol Hill?” I loved those catchy little tunes. Our scriptures this week made me think of Schoolhouse Rock and their “Verbs” video. It’s all about “action” words.

Our scripture you heard this morning from Genesis is all about action with Abraham and Sarah. For any of you who think you may not be worthy of God’s love, all we need to do is take a look at Abraham and Sarah. Talk about an imperfect family!

In one of my first Bible classes I had to write a 10-page paper on Abraham, so I got to know him and Sarah up close.

We come to the Abraham narrative in Genesis following the Tower of Babel story, where God was unhappy with uniformity of the human race and created a scattered population of diverse languages.

The builders of the Tower of Babel had hoped to make a great name for themselves, but after the scattering, God promises to Abraham (formerly known as Abram) to make his name great, and to make Abraham “a great nation”.

This man's story is filled with promise and faith. God calls the faithful Abraham, and he obeys looking at the promise of the potential inheritance of land and an heir for that land. His faithful wife, Sarai (later known as Sarah), also obeys in faith based on the offered potential promise of a son. This couple fully embraces the call of God.

The family sets out on their pilgrimage, with the journey serving as a way of characterizing the life of faith. They are not sure what the future holds, but God has promised, and they are strong in their faith. Their expedition is one of faith and promise, faith and covenant, and faith and fulfillment. Their journey was not without fear, fault, stumble and sorrow, but their commitment to the fulfillment of the promise remained steadfast.

<sup>1</sup>The Merriam-Webster Dictionary first cites the word "faith" as a noun meaning loyalty, a trust in, a conviction. But lastly at the very end of the definition it gives a little bit of recognition of "faith" as a verb. I thought that was unusual because I think of "faith" FIRST as a verb...an action word.

<sup>2</sup>You know, looking back on the story of Abraham and Sarah, God has a funny way of doing things. If you were going to pick one family out of all the families of the earth to be "God's chosen family, wouldn't you choose two beautiful, young, wealthy and strong people living in the most powerful nation in the world?

But that's not what God does. He chooses this elderly couple who are way beyond their childbearing years. If they were here in this century, that would be considered social nobodies. They live in a tent. Wander nomadically. Not only are the old and rootless, they also find it difficult to trust God's promises.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/faith>

<sup>2</sup> *A Preacher's Guide to Lectionary Sermon Series*. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville, KY. Print.

Our scripture for today begins in chapter 18, but way back in chapter 12 God first promised Abraham offspring. But years go by, and there is still no baby. The couple gets so impatient, in fact, that in chapter 16, they take matters into their own and really mess things up. Remember the story of Hagar, the servant girl bearing Abraham's son? What a disaster that turned out to be!

Finally...FINALLY...in spite of their age, in spite of their living in a tent, God shows up to reiterate the promise. Our scripture describes three strangers, who are mysteriously and wonderfully also referred to as "the Lord." How can three people be called by one name? Let's just reckon back to last week when we celebrated Trinity Sunday! These 3 strangers have arrived to bring a message to this aging couple, who have struggled with their faith throughout the years of waiting.

Abraham and Sarah show these guests great hospitality. I think it's comical how after years of caring for Abraham, he feels like he has to "mansplain" to Sarah how to make the cakes. He acts like Sarah never made them before. It reminds me of my own husband after he retired, that after 20 years of loading the dishwasher myself, he decided I didn't know how to do it correctly. He would stand over me each time I was loading it wrong. But Abraham is so eager to welcome these guests that he can't help hovering in the kitchen.

Once the guests have eaten, they relay their very specific message: "This time next year, Sarah will have a son." The message makes Sarah **laugh** with joy and disbelief. We end the story smiling at the goodness of God, who brings life and joy to a family that seems to have lost hope. They are action figures living out the verb of faith. I encourage you to read the Abraham stories in the book of Genesis. You'll see how God can use people you would least expect.

Perhaps they could sing this song of joy that we hear in our Psalter reading for today from Psalm 100. This is one of the most beloved

psalms of all time. Accredited to King David, it's the #1 hit of the Psalm's top 10. A Psalm for giving grateful praise.

It's important to note that one of the reasons this psalm is so powerful is because it is in motion. It's an action Psalm. Four of the five verses begin with action verb. From the NIV we read:

<sup>1</sup> “**SHOUT** for joy to the LORD, all the earth.” Shout is your verb here.

Next is, “<sup>2</sup> **WORSHIP** the LORD with gladness; **COME** before him with joyful songs.

Then we hear, “<sup>3</sup> **KNOW** that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

<sup>4</sup> “**ENTER** his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; **GIVE** thanks to him and **PRAISE** his name.”

<sup>5</sup> “For the LORD is good and his love **ENDURES** forever; his **FAITHFULNESS CONTINUES** through all generations.

Each of these verbs in this scripture compels us to do something. **SHOUT, WORSHIP, COME, KNOW, ENTER, GIVE, PRAISE.** This scripture is a call to worship that goes out to the people of the whole world, because we all need to acknowledge the Lord our God because of what he has done for us.

Let's be people that lead a “verb”-kind of life; one of action and joy. Let us throw our heads back and laugh like Sarah knowing that God is with us...even when we are not the perfect family...even when our faith waivers...even when we forget that God's faithfulness to us endures although ours sometimes doesn't. Let us praise God and raise the name of Jesus in joyful song all the days of our lives!

Amen.