**18 June, 2023 P3A** That’s ridiculous!

**Based on: Genesis 18:1–15, (21:1–7)** Psalm 116: 1–2, 12–19 Matthew 9:35–10:8, (9–23) Romans 5:1–8

**Genesis 18:1–15, (21:1–7)**

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

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

The Lord dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. Now Sarah said, ‘God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.’ And she said, ‘Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.’

**Psalm 116**

I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my supplications.   
Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.   
What shall I return to the Lord for all his bounty to me?   
I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord,   
I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.   
Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones.   
O Lord, I am your servant; I am your servant, the child of your serving-maid.  
   You have loosed my bonds. I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the Lord.   
I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people,   
in the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem.  
Praise the Lord!

**Romans 5:1–8**

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

**Matthew 9:35–10:8, (9–23)**

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.’

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: ‘Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, “The kingdom of heaven has come near.” Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for labourers deserve their food. Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgement than for that town.

‘See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

**That’s ridiculous**

Which part of these two readings, one about Abraham and one is Jesus sending out his 12 disciples, is ridiculous?

Is it Abraham having a son at 100 years old. Is it the 3 men who appeared to Abraham that he bowed down to and welcomed as ‘The Lord’. Is it Sarah who conceived, bore and suckled a son, Isaac, well beyond her fertile years?

Is it ridiculous that the apostles were instructed not to take a spare anything or money on a journey to tell the good news to the house of Israel?

**Getting ready.**

One of the ideas to assist with giving a talk in church is to see if anything jumps out of the page for you when you look at the readings. The thing that I noticed was the mentions of preparation or getting ready.

This resonated with me as we are in a working group that is looking at practical ways to prepare individual families and the Eden community for disasters – whatever form that will take. To the credit of our little Uniting Church, there are 4 members who take an active part in this community group. It resonates again with me also on a more personal level in that Pam and I are making and implementing plans to be more prepared for bushfire – also whatever form and timing that may take.

There are many things in our modern life that we consider important to prepare for.

* Having a baby
* Getting ready for important visitors
* Preparing for an event

What I noticed is that in the passages there are 2 very divergent instances of preparation. Can we learn anything from these examples when they are so different?

* Abraham, with Sarah and a servant doing all the work, made ready for the divine visitors who were to give him the good news about his continuing genetic line. Remember last week about the promise that God had made about his offspring being as numerous as the stars as well as bequeathing him the lands that roughly contain the modern Israel plus the land they are now trying to colonise. This expansive thinking of Abraham would take a lot of preparation on its own when you and your wife are beyond child bearing age.
* The second example about preparation is Jesus sends out the 12 disciples into acknowledged danger with little preparedness. In fact, they are given a list of things not to take. It seems the only positive advice is to move on to another place if you strike trouble. Unlike another sending out of Jesus where he sends out 70 disciples, they are not even instructed to travel in pairs.

What can we take from these two different attitudes to preparedness. One- do all you can in the time you have to get ready and the other NT one is that even though you are tempted to prepare physically, don’t, but be ready for anything spiritually.

Ridiculousness?

1 Cor 1:23 *but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,*

Pam and Reza and I went to Beyond Festival in Canberra a few years ago and met people from a group that worked as Christian missionaries called to the most deprived areas of Asian cities. They didn’t just work there or send money, they lived amongst and in the conditions matching the conditions of those they were trying to help.

**Dana Asia** aims to eradicate povertyby using social business, microfinance, and education as tools to address social problems in impoverished communities, improving access to productive resources and reducing inequalities.

This sounds ridiculous to us here, safely in Eden. But this group is effective.

Matthew’s description of sending out the 12 named apostles without any physical supports also seems ridiculous.

This, to us may seem a world away. that the cost and dangers seem to high. This chapter is sometimes referred to as the “missionary discourse.” For us, as first world readers in a mainline denomination, this chapter seems a world away “with its talk of witness, persecution, poverty, and martyrdom.

To the extent that it seems a world away, alien, it is a call to re-examine our own version of Christianity” Christianity- meaning modelling on and following Jesus.

Such a re-examination is in order, I think. I wonder whether we in fact have a form of “culture Christianity;” a ‘churchy’ existence that has become so “well-adapted” to our culture that it is indistinguishable from it? In our situation of ease, have we lost our prophetic edge and with it a sense of the distance between the reign of God and the status quo? Is it possible that the very things that, in our context, have made it easy to be a Christian have made it harder to follow Jesus?

We have heard over the last few weeks about the work of the Spirit. At Pentecost, as Steve covered in an analysis of The Trinity. **Comfort** is not a fruit of the spirit. While Jesus promised a Comforter, they do not offer a life of comfort. In fact, it would seem the claim that to lose one’s life is the only way to find it suggests that the pursuit of comfort embraces death and destruction.

What would we, as a church, be getting ready for? What do we need to do to prepare as a group or individually?

The disciples were asked to risk life and rejection to carry on the mission of Jesus. By the time Matthew was writing the movement was already confronted by resistance, opposition or even death. Matthew was writing knowing his current situation of risk was real. Peter, the Apostle, probably had already been martyred by Nero. The mission of Jesus that the disciples and us, as Jesus’ followers- If I were to summarise that I would say making people whole. The wholeness included healing physically and spiritually, justifying (or setting right) people and place in the sight of God.

I’ve put some ‘getting readys’ in order, I think of difficulty, that may be relevant to our church.

* Getting ready for an event at the church. This seems the easiest activity but there are always decisions to be made.
  + How do we or do we stand out from other secular events?
  + What message of the gospel do we send in our welcome and commitment to anyone who comes? Even this week we have had discussions at a church event about the para-normal with someone who sees contact with the spiritual world as their paying vocation. They still regard themselves as welcome.
* Getting ready for your own personal mission. Getting ready, as the 12 disciples did, seemingly one-by-one, to carry on the mission of Jesus who made people whole by healing them, releasing them from unclean spirits? Craig D. Lounsbrough, a councilor and author ….

*“These are the times when our faith is not just an idea or a concept that we throw around. It’s something that has to actually be lived out.”* ― Craig D. Lounsbrough

Is it being psychologically and spiritually ready for rejection? As in the Matthew passage, Jesus warns his disciples of the potential division and rejection that His message could engender.

*Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.*

* Getting ready for a church to change or confirm direction. We have been discussing the National Church Life Survey results – dissecting them as they relate to our congregation.

I think that out of the ridiculous matters in these readings there are still some lessons of faith in the journey of following God’s plan for our lives, our church family and indirectly into our communities. Sure, there’s discomfort in hearing the messages from the Bible here today. This discomfort is not going to go away as we follow the mission that Jesus has set before us. Life is going to be chaotic and require faith to follow. In the chaos and unpredictability of life we will enter new ways to meet with our community.