

Hope is what sustains us. We use hope in a lot of ways – often in the sense of offering a good wish for someone – hope you are well. Children use hope to share their desires – I hope I get.....from Santa. But hope is so much bigger than simply a good wish or desire. Hope is a cherished desire with anticipation or to expect with confidence. God made promises to Abraham – even when he laughed. God continued to move towards fulfillment. God has promised Abraham the land and the multitude of nations. Our readings today begin to show not simply promises of what is to come but evidence that the promises is being fulfilled.

Abraham and Sarah had lived long lives before the birth of Isaac so that their deaths come in today's readings are no surprise. As we've moved through their story we see that God has promised a great deal and after laughing that both Abraham & Sarah have the opportunity to see the beginnings of the promises become reality. Sarah is afforded the joy of having and raising Isaac. What joy that must have brought in her life. The text does not specify but we can assume that Sarah died peacefully from old age. And immediately we learn that Abraham weeps for his wife. Sarah's promise from God had been fulfilled in the birth and life of her son, Isaac.

Abraham, heavy with grief and the need to bury his wife sets off to purchase land. We might be asking why hasn't God given

him the land that was promised. That is a good question, one that the text does not answer directly. As Abraham offers to purchase the land he is met with resistance, not because the owners don't want to part with their land. No, those whom he is dealing with are well aware of who Abraham is and what promises have been made on his behalf. Abraham insists, however, on purchasing the land. And so, Abraham purchases the land – the first of the promised land is now in his possession.

We also learn that Abraham continues to live and produce children in our second reading. But Abraham deals with these children differently than he does with Ishmael and Isaac. The children from his concubine are given gifts and sent to live in another land. To Isaac he gives everything. At the death of Abraham, both of his son's come to bury him next to Sarah. The come together with no ill will and in fact the conclusion of the passage of chapter 25 we get Ishmael's genealogy – and is referred to in the same language as Isaac. Abraham had asked God to remember his first born son and true to form, God fulfills the promise. Isaac & Ishmael remain equally sons of the promises. As we go onto learn more about the promise as lived out in Isaac, we do learn that Ishmael fathers 12 sons and are the princes of kingdoms much in the same that Isaac's descendants will go on to become the 12 tribes of Israel.

God keeps promises as demonstrated over and over again in Abraham and Sarah's lives. We begin to get the glimpse that God will continue to be faithful to Isaac, knowing that everything has been passed on to him and learning that Ishmael has already become the father of 12. And today, more than ever, we need to have hope.

We continue to wait and watch until that time when life begins to go back to normal. None of us imagined that we would still be waiting. Perhaps we're weary to go back and maybe even frustrated that other church families have gathered in person and we have not. But we're not alone. Many congregations continue to worship together but in their own homes. We continue to hear stories, including in our own community of churches that have to return to virtual worship practices when someone gets ill. It's hard. We may even have new appreciation for Sarah devising the plan for Abraham to get a child from her maid. Anything to get out of this barren time. And yet, Sarah before her death had more joy than she could imagine. You may be thinking, preacher – we didn't read anywhere that Sarah was joyful before death. And you'd be right, except she was alive with her son, whose name is laughter – how could she be anything but joyful.

Abraham and Sarah did not get to fully live into the promise that God gave to them. They died before living in the land that

was promised. For that to be fulfilled many more things had to happen and their descendants had to patient. They had to wait. And so we wait for what's next. But we do not wait as people without hope. We know that God will bring us back together. We know that there will be rejoicing. We wait hearing news that Houston Methodist appears to have some successful treatments. We wait hearing that some vaccines are showing promise. We wait watching what happens in the larger communities of Southeast Texas as some students & staff have begun the school year in person. We wait with hope that no matter where we are God is with us and binds us to the promise of life. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.