

Sunday, June 18, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church
Bible Study
“Is Anything Too Wonderful?”
Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7 and Matthew 9:35-10:8 (9-23)

Open with a word of prayer

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, invite participants to share the wonderful things happening in the church. (List the impactful ministries of your faith community.)

Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7. Context. As chapter 18 begins, God had already promised to Abraham, even at the ripe old age of 99, that he would become a father of a multitude of nations. It gave Abraham a chuckle, since he had no son. In this week’s reading, we hear a confirmation of God’s promise, and the fulfillment of it. Woven into the story of God’s promise is the story of Abraham and Sarah’s hospitality: they “entertain angels unawares.” In fact, even God appears in this scene as one of the travelers. The balance of the story is really Sarah’s story: she hears the promise of a son, and responds as Abraham had earlier. But her laugh of disbelief becomes joy at the birth of Isaac.

Matthew 9:35-10:8 (9-23). Context. This week’s reading is the first half of the second of the five collections of Jesus’ sayings in Matthew. This collection, sometimes called the “Missionary Discourse,” follows the first discourse, the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus describes how his disciples should live their day to day lives. Here, he sends them out as laborers into the harvest, with the authority to preach and heal even as he has been preaching and healing. In this passage he sends them specifically to the “lost sheep of Israel.” This reflects the focus of Matthew’s community on the mission to the Jews, and what was Jesus’ principal focus in his own ministry. The conclusion of this passage highlights the conviction that Matthew and his community were convinced that the Kingdom of God was surely about to break in upon the world, living as they did in the chaotic aftermath of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD.

Read Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7 and Matthew 9:35-10:8 (9-23)

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn’t make sense to you in the text?

Read Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7 and Matthew 9:35-10:8 (9-23) again -

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

- What was Sarah’s reaction when she heard that she would have a son? (Gen. 18:12) Have you had an experience of unimaginable good things happening to others or you?

- After Jesus notes the size of the harvest and the lack of laborers, what does he do next? (Matthew 9:37-38) [Jesus authorizes and sends out the twelve in ministry.] Do you think they were ready? How similar might we feel to being sent in ministry today?
- Why might it be important that Matthew lists the names of these twelve disciples? (Matthew 10:2-4) [It gives specificity. Twelve is a deliberate echo of the twelve tribes of Israel.] Among other things, Matthew's listing of these names shows that they are a diverse group coming from all walks of life, nationalities, and across the political spectrum (fishermen, a tax collector, and even a Cananean. Matthew, a tax collector, and Judas, who betrayed Jesus and elsewhere identified as Iscariot, would likely have been on the opposite end of the political spectrum of the time.) What might this say about the making of disciples today?
- *"A community exists for one another and is open to those who haven't yet found their way in. It isn't about meeting needs or satisfying hungers; the community is about building relationships. It is about belonging and serving."* Do you think your church is a crowd or a community? Do you consider your church friendly? If so, are congregants friendly to those within the church and/or to new people? Does your church help new people belong?
- "See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16). Jesus described persecutions the disciples would likely face. Following God's call as an individual and as a community may not be easy and will require sacrifices of some sort Are there special needs your church sees in your community? Are there special circumstances your church is called to act upon? (homelessness, needs in local schools, gun violence, women in shelters). What next steps do you and your church need to take to follow God's calling?

Closing Reflection Question

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

God of compassion, you have given yourself to us in Jesus Christ, and you continue to be present to us through the Holy Spirit. We pray for more laborers to be sent into the harvest. Stir our hearts to answer your call as individuals and as a community. Equip us with your authority to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out

demons. May we freely receive your blessings and freely give them to others. In your precious name, Jesus Christ, our lord, we pray. **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord's Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power
and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.