

On Monday morning the first guests starting arriving. They were young but loud and energetic. Keeping them entertained for even just a couple of minutes was challenging. Monday evening different guests arrived. These were older, more worn out from their day. Each set of guests required preparation, setup, takedown, and decorations. It wouldn't have been nice if we had done nothing for either group. It certainly wouldn't have been nice if we had made them do all the work themselves. Better to do the work before they arrived because they were visiting us. Visitors shouldn't do the work.

When VBS children come to visit it's exhausting but wonderful. Having plenty of volunteers helps too. When the Kingdom Workers and Christian Aid and Relief workers from all over the U.S. come to visit and help with tornado relief it's also wonderful. Both sets of visitors doing very different things and yet at the center of each group is a desire by us to share the Word of God and let people know about Jesus.

In the first book of the Bible a man by the name of Abraham had a different experience with visitors. These guests showed up unannounced, giving him no time to prepare or decorate or even clean up. But that didn't mean Abraham wasn't ready. Abraham was a man of faith. The center of his life was the Word of God and so in the first lesson he knew what to do...

When the Lord comes to visit
Welcome and serve him
Listen and trust him

Abraham was doing what you would do if you had to be outside with no air conditioning on a 100 degree day, he was sitting in the shade. Suddenly Abraham had company. **"Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground."** Like visitors standing at your front door, they wouldn't come in until they were invited. But did you notice how Abraham treated them? He ran to them, met them, and bowed before them. These are strangers.

That wasn't the end. The visitors said nothing and requested nothing. Yet recognizing they might be tired from walking in the heat on the sand Abraham got them water for their feet and shade for their heads. Then **"Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. 'Quick,' he said, 'get three seahs of fine flour and knead it and bake some bread. Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant who hurried to prepare it."** A bushel basket of flour would make a lot of bread. The calf, curds, and milk were usually only for special meals. Abraham went out of his way to welcome and serve these three men with a feast. Remember he's never met them and had no idea why they were there.

In the gospel we heard about Martha, who while Jesus was over for a visit, busied herself with preparations. Her sister listened while Jesus taught. Martha complained but Jesus said it was Mary who was doing the right thing. She was listening to the Word of God. That was more important. Was Abraham doing the right thing by scrambling to prepare a feast instead of sitting with his divine visitors? We don't know if Abraham knew who was sitting in his tent. But Abraham was no Martha. He scrambled to bake bread, slaughter a calf, and get a full meal prepared. His gracious hospitality was an act of faith, based on God's grace, and the Lord was pleased.

Do you think the art of hospitality is going away? Formal invitations, nice china settings, proper utensil placement has been replaced by electronic invitations and plastic forks and knives. But loss of hospitality isn't the real serious problem. Welcoming and serving visitors is important. But welcoming the Lord in our homes is even more important. When God seeks to be a visitor in our homes, do we always have the time? Table prayers before meals get said quickly without thought or not at all. Devotions with family get left by the wayside because of video games or real games. Personal Bible reading is replaced with racing from work to home to wherever and back again. Lack of hospitality shows a lack of caring for those around us. Lack of hospitality to the Word of God, which should be the center of our lives, might show something worse. It might show a lack of concern for our faith.

A personal visit from the almighty God in heaven isn't a normal everyday thing. But in this case **"The Lord appeared to Abraham"** and was a visitor. God descended to visit us as well. We don't deserve his visit. But he came while we were sinners and because we are still sinners. He comes in love to show love by his Son Jesus. God showed love to Abraham by eating what he served. God shows love to us by being with us in our hearts by faith every day. He reminds us of our Savior who gives us eternal life. He serves us and welcomes us at the meal we eat together called Lord's Supper. Our Lord appears to us by grace.

When the Lord comes for a visit welcome and serve him. Live your life of faith and know that whenever you serve someone you're doing it for the person you see, but also for the heavenly Father you don't see. Other people are not in your life to be used and discarded. They're creatures designed by God and loved by him so you might serve them. In that way you will welcome and serve the Lord who has come for a visit.

I've been known to start something without first reading the instructions. I guess men have that tendency. Open up the package and try and figure it out right away. Of course there might come a time when the instructions have a purpose. We can't jump right in and start doing the right thing living a good life. We first need instructions. We need to listen to and trust in the Lord. That must come first. Only when we know God's grace can we listen and trust him.

With one question the tone of the meal changed. **“Where is your wife Sarah?”** Most men would not have spoken about another man’s wife so openly and certainly wouldn’t have known her name. The man spoke with authority. Remember, this is the Lord. He knew exactly where Sarah was and who she was. But he wanted Abraham and Sarah to realize who was visiting their tent. God was there because what he was about to share Sarah needed to hear too.

Abraham for the better part of twenty-four years had been waiting for one promise of God to come true. With no children and 100 year old bodies it seemed hopeless. Twenty-four years of nothing. Then just weeks before this visit Abraham once again heard the promise, now also hearing it would be within a year. Sarah didn’t hear, so now here was God visiting in their tent to express the promise of a son and through that ultimately a Savior for both their benefit. **“I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.”** It sounded impossible. Could they listen and trust?

Laughter sometimes covers unspoken doubt. Like laughing about not having a job for so long that you wonder if it will ever happen. Will God ever provide? Or like laughing because of a close call while driving that you can’t believe you’re still alive. Could it be God provided a miracle? Or laughing because finally there’s nothing left to do but give up hope when the Lord doesn’t seem to be answering prayers. Is he really listening? Then there’s entirely different laughing. Laughing the world sometimes does over the promises God makes about heaven and hell, sin and death. Are those places real? Sure death is real, but is it really a consequence of my sins?

Doubt is no laughing matter. **“Why did Sarah laugh?”** The Lord was serious in his promise. He was pouring out his grace and Sarah was laughing. We do the same thing when we doubt the Lord’s promises to us. God is serious, both about sin, but also about saving us. Through the Word he promises he knows everything. He knows our doubts and he knows our laughter. Yet still he invites us to listen and trust him. Trust him because he’s promising us something far greater than this imperfect world. Through Christ Jesus he’s promising us a place that will be perfect. And between the promises God’s Word says, **“Is anything too hard for the Lord?”** It’s nothing for God to send a Savior for you. It’s nothing for God to wipe your sins away by his death. And it’s nothing to raise you on the last day to bring you with Jesus to heaven. These he’s already done. When the Lord comes to visit just listen and trust him based on his Word.

You’ll never have a visitor like the Lord. He doesn’t come knocking on our front doors but rather through the Word of God. There he comes for a visit with his Holy Spirit and works faith in our hearts. By the gift of faith we’re able to welcome and serve him by serving others. And by the gift of faith we’re able to listen and trust his wonderful promises. Enjoy God’s promises and live without questions or doubts. Nothing is impossible for the Lord who has come for a visit.