



**Sermon for the Fifth Sunday After Pentecost
July 2, 2023**



**Guest Lay Preacher Charlyn Bridges
New Life Episcopal Church, Uniontown, OH**

Click Here for today's Readings:
[Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – The Episcopal Church](#)

5 Pentecost

July 2, 2023

New Life Episcopal Church, Uniontown, OH

Guest Lay Preacher Charlyn Bridges

We were so excited about the birth of our first child! After six and a half years, we were finally expecting! So excited were we that we actually asked our doctors if we could document the birth of our first child. One approved; the other – not so much. But we decided to approach the hospital for their approval.

This was just after Roe V Wade and it was having an immediate effect on the maternity wing at Little Company of Mary Hospital in our little coastal community in California. You see, if a doctor had a patient in labor and a patient scheduled for an abortion, he wanted them at the same hospital. This Catholic hospital was at risk of closing their maternity department. The nuns at Little Company of Mary hospital prayed. With some determination, they resolved to get better at the business of bringing babies into the world. So ---when we approached them, looking as normal as possible, they were elated. Of course, you can take photos! Tell your story! And we'll use your visuals and story in the classes for prospective parents we plan to teach in preparation for their child's birth.

All went as planned. Our friend, who'd had six children by natural childbirth, joined us in the delivery room. Joe was at my head with another camera.

The nurses made sure I was draped with enough fabric to make the event tasteful and the delivery room was filled with encouragement and laughter.

From my hospital room, I wrote the next issue of the hospital newsletter, wrote a first-person story for the local newspaper and all was well.

It was time to go home. The pediatrician came to my room and said, "You can go. ---The baby has to stay here."

He spoke in medical shorthand and I didn't understand. We would go home, and our baby would be put in a Plexiglas box with lights in the hospital nursery.

Well, the road home seemed long. The house was still and quiet. We waited for the phone call that said we could come back and claim our baby.

Days went by and we were allowed only 30-minute visits each day. And then back home to wait for updates until one day, 10 days later, we could finally bring our first-born home.

The years rolled back for me as I read about Sarah and Abraham. They didn't wait days or years; they waited decades! They were old enough to be

great-grandparents by the time they became parents. God had promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the Heavens. And we're learning, in this generation, how many more stars there are than we earlier thought.

The promise of God didn't have a date attached to it so as the couple waited and waited – and aged. Sarah seems to have worn her age well as she continued to turn the heads of the rulers of that day but after a few years of waiting for God's promise, she began to take matters into her own hands.

We want to shout back through the centuries and say "Sarah, don't do it!" but she devised a plan that we're still dealing with today.

Do you ever do that? Pray to God and then give him suggestions as how to answer your prayers? No need to raise your hand.

HA! I did! In my young motherhood days, just before one Christmas, I was talking to God and told him that our toddler boys were growing out of their pajamas. Then I added: "Maybe Grandmother will send them some for Christmas." Did you catch that? I told God how to answer my prayer. It was a small thing. Moments later, the phone rang. It was Tim Stevenson, owner of Stephenson Music Center. We wrote and produced his television commercials. "Charlyn" he started, "I want you to produce our Christmas commercial and I want your boys to be in it. I want them to wear those red union suits with the back flaps..."

That was God, letting me know that he cares about the little things in my life and that he can answer my prayers in the most imaginative of ways and that I should, "let him do His work". He can handle the needs in my life and he can also reverse the reproductive systems in aging saints.

But, Back to Sarah!

She thought God needed help in fulfilling His promise, So she gave her servant, Hagar, to Abraham to produce a child. This wasn't Abraham's idea and it certainly wasn't Hagar's idea, but a son was born of this union.

In time, the Lord made it clear that his covenant would be through Abraham and Sarah's eventual own son. So... Isaac was born and brought laughter into the lives of his parents. Imagine, after all these years, having a son; watching him do all the things that babies do and growing into maturity. It would have been so perfect, but Sarah could see the contrast between the Son of Promise and the son of compromise. It was a constant reminder of her own manipulations to God's promise.

Sarah sent Hagar and her son Ismael into the desert. Were it not for God's direct intervention, the first sacrifice would have been Ishmael. It was

Sarah's decision and it broke Abraham's heart. But God spoke to Abraham and Abraham complied with Sarah's wishes.

What we see throughout Abraham's life is obedience.

Like, --- God tells Abraham to leave his home and move to another place--- and he obeys. When God tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on the altar, we have no dialog of Abraham questioning God. We also have no dialog of Abraham telling Sarah what God had required of him. What would Sarah have said or done had she known what God had asked of Abraham?

I know that if God had asked **us** to sacrifice our child, he would have gotten an earful of southern sass. But we don't see that in Abraham.

When Isaac questions his father about where the sacrifice will come from, the old man tell his son, "God will provide." but Abraham was poised to carry out God's directive when he was stopped. He had already bound his son and placed him on the altar on top of the firewood.

How could God ask such a thing? This is a hard passage to think that God would give such a precious gift and then ask for it back. As Abraham lifted the knife the Angel of the Lord intervened: "Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to harm him for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." Imagine coming that close to sacrificing that long awaited son!

For the answer, we have to move forward from Genesis. We're all here today because God himself became the sacrifice. He came to live among us, to open the gates back into the garden that we were thrown out of in Genesis and to bring us back into relationship with himself.

One verse that brings me to my spiritual knees every time I hear it is this: "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." There were no conditions attached to this. We weren't told, "You'll have to shape up if I sacrifice my life for you. He did it, period. That's why I'm here and why you're here.

Thanks be to God!

Amen?