

Hope: The Powerful Oddity
by Rev. Durrell Watkins, M.A., M.Div.
June 15, 2008 – Sunshine Cathedral
Romans 5.1-5

The bible is full of odd stories; but “odd” isn’t necessarily bad.

For instance, it is odd for the church to celebrate every year a tale about an unwed and temporarily homeless mother having a baby in a barn. Odder still that story is the one used to assure us that God is with us!

It’s odd to claim that a crucified peasant lives on somehow, and that his transcendent life enriches and empowers our own. It’s an odd claim, but one that has energized Christians for centuries.

It is odd for a persecutor of Christians to have a mystic vision of the Cosmic Christ followed by a personal conversion that leaves him as the single largest contributor to what would become our New Testament! And yet that is the story of the Apostle Paul.

It was odd on October 6, 1968 for a defrocked Pentecostal gay minister to have church with 12 people in his living room; and odder still for that tiny, unlikely church to grow into the now 40 year old, world-wide Metropolitan Community Churches movement that includes the resplendent Sunshine Cathedral.

It is odd for a church to decide be more welcoming by saying we won’t condemn you for your difference, neither will we make you invisible by pretending we don’t notice your difference.

I had a friend once who said, “I never think of you as gay.” And I said, “Then you don’t think of me as who I am. You’ve erased my reality to accommodate your comfort, which is as homophobic as if you called me nasty names.”

It’s odd to summon the courage to say: We don’t condemn difference, neither do we ignore difference; here at the Sunshine Cathedral we celebrate difference!

It is odd that the last bastions of patriarchy feel so threatened today that they must try to write discrimination into state constitutions to keep *liberty and justice for all* from being realized. Their desperate act may delay justice but it will not ultimately deny it.

So when I say that I love odd stories, please hear what I really mean. In the odd, the unlikely, the peculiar, the unusual, the unprecedented, Something wonderful is often at work. In the midst of the odd, we may just find God.

In Genesis 17 we learn that the patriarch Abraham is 100 years old and his wife, Sarah, is 90. Then in the following chapter, Genesis 18, we read about God accompanied by two messengers calling on Abraham and Sarah. If I were 100 and angels came knocking on my door, I might start to panic a little bit. But, as I’ve told you before, I’m a worrier.

God and angels making a house call: the story is already a little odd. But as the story progresses we discover that God and company promise that 90 year old Sarah will become pregnant. Sarah, the story says, laughs out loud; but the joke's on her because in chapter 21, 90 year old Sarah gives birth to Isaac.

Now, if this were a news report, I'd have to call it tabloid journalism. But it isn't journalism, and it isn't history in a modern, social scientific sense. It is a sacred story, a story that is intentionally *odd* as a way of saying that long after we have given up on ourselves, God has not given up on us.

Is the story factual? I have some doubts; but is it true? I believe it absolutely is!

It's odd to have hope when life seems hopeless.

It's odd, ridiculous, sometimes even laughable for people to dare to hope when despair would seem the more reasonable response.

But as queer, as odd as hope can be, the biblical witness calls us to be the oddly hopeful of the world.

That's why St. Paul reminds us, "We know that affliction produces perseverance, and perseverance [produces]...character; and character [produces] hope. And such a hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the holy Spirit who has been given to us."

Now, the Sarah story isn't all bubble gum and balloons. First of all, she's going through pregnancy at 90...what will the other couples on Canasta night say? Never mind the morning sickness, and the actual difficulties of labor.

Then, there is Sarah in her mid-90s chasing Issac around in his "terrible twos."

And then there is the unforgivable moment that her husband takes the child of her old age and is willing to make a human sacrifice of him because he believes that's what God wants.

And, there is the time when Sarah, to protect her own privilege, oppresses her African servant, Hagar.

There are lots of twists and turns in this story. Hope doesn't mean that life will be easy, or that we won't make mistakes, or that disappointment will never come our way.

But, difficulties can produce the kind of character that leads to hope, and hope doesn't disappoint.

Circumstances will disappoint.

People will disappoint.

Institutions will disappoint. The Florida Lotto disappoints me twice a week!

We will even disappoint ourselves.

But hope doesn't disappoint.

Hope simply reminds us that possibilities still exist and that God still cares. And sometimes, that's all we need to experience a miracle in our lives.

Whatever you are facing today, I can't promise that it will work out the way you want as fast as you want. But I can promise that because of the love of God being poured out into your heart, there is reason to hope. This is the Good News. Amen.

© Durrell Watkins 2008

**God's love is filling my heart now.
The spirit of hope is filling my heart now.
I dare to be a person of hope.
And I know that hope will not disappoint.
Thank you, God!
Amen.**

The last word comes from Rev. Allan K. Chalmers, civil rights activist and mentor to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Chalmers said, "The grand essentials of happiness are: something to do, something to love, and something to hope for."