I love today’s reading from the Hebrew scripture. “Sarah laughed to herself,” stated the writer! I love it. Divine Messengers had been sent to tell Abraham that he would become a father, with Sarah, his wife who had been unable to bear a child, being the Mother. But, as the writer told us they were “old, advanced in age….” Enter the voice of the Lord. God asked Abraham why Sarah laughed. God goes on saying “Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?” Sarah continued to deny that she had laughed because she was afraid of God. What I want you to remember for now is God’s question: “Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?”

The psalmist tells us that his love for the Lord arises from God’s hearing the voice of his supplication. God has “inclined his ear to me whenever I called upon him.” Many voices in our community have been raised in supplication: some in a church, some from home. Others pray while driving. Protestors walking the streets of
our city, uncertain how they might be received by law enforcement, prayed for safety. Their actions were and are also a prayer for change. They are a prayer that injustice will come to an end, and righteousness takes over. Which raises for me one question: what is my role in all this? And I hear God’s voice, directed to Sarah and Abraham, “is anything too wonderful for the Lord?”

First, this is like déjà vu. I grew up in a segregated community in western Kentucky. I remember as a pre-adolescent seeing the brutality of whites toward civil rights protestors in the south. I remember the power of Dr. King’s “I have a dream” speech, a speech that for me signaled a change in our country. It took some more time and events for the passage of civil rights legislation to take place. Dr. King continued to push for justice in all spheres of life and was assassinated, leading to burning cities. We saw flames again and again, but at that time in history, progress had been made, and was being made, and many of us naively believed that
American society had been permanently changed for the better. I believe our churches believed that too. Our voices became focused on other issues. But now, here we are again. Death, destruction, fury, and pain. What should we do? I propose to consider what we know about God, and God’s call to us. And that question “Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?”

Matthew today told us of Jesus sending out the 12 disciples. We are introduced to Jesus at a busy point in his ministry. He was teaching, proclaiming, and curing people. He saw the people around him, and as Matthew says “He had compassion for them.” He saw that others were needed to share in His work of proclaiming the coming of God’s Kingdom because the needs were so great. With that knowledge He summoned the Twelve. He gave them authority over disease and sickness. Even the unclean spirits were unable to stand against their authority. So there they were, the twelve. They included the one who would eventually betray him, Judas Iscariot. There was Simon Peter, who would go on to deny
Him. But they were his 12 disciples. Mortals, like you and like me. And Jesus sent them out to do his work and told them to “proclaim the good news” that the “Kingdom of Heaven has come near.”

I am proposing that you and I are now empowered by God’s Holy Spirit, celebrated just 2 weeks ago at Pentecost. That Spirit gives us the power to heal, to deal with sickness, be it spiritual, emotional, physical or societal. We are not all called to do the same things. Not at all. But all are called. We have a message that heals. What did Jesus tell us? The starting point for me is in the verses that we call the Summary of the Law. Like many episodes in scripture, a question was posed to Jesus, asking Him what, exactly was the greatest law? It was a trick designed to get Jesus in trouble. His answer was indisputable though, for he went to the great commandment of the Hebrew law, “Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength.” This was the first and great commandment Jesus said. He went on to say there was a second commandment, “like unto it:
thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self.” This forms the heart of Jesus teaching to us. It is the test by which I gauge everything I do. Am I living in such a way to visibly be loving God, and my neighbor? I ask you in this time of unrest to ask yourself that question. And then, I want you to remember God’s words to Sarah: “Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?” And we know that no, nothing is too wonderful. Unfortunately, sometimes God’s will is not what is running the show in human society.

And that brings us back to us, today, gathered in this church virtually for the most part. I have often felt like a totally unworthy disciple, but a disciple I am. The reading from Romans ended with a sentence that has always been at the core of my faith: “God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.” Or as the same reading began “Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” We lack nothing. Nothing. Does God have a plan for us? Yes, God does. Can we as individuals, and as a worshiping community help
to address the brokenness that has sprung into the full view of us all? I say, as a worshiping community, we can. We have the authority given by Jesus, made available to us through the power of the Holy Spirit. God has called us. Each of us who has been baptized in the Episcopal Church, and everyone who has participated in a reaffirmation of baptismal vows has been asked if we will seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves? And we answered. “I will, with God’s help.” And then we were asked if we would “strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being? And again our response was “I will, with God’s help.” Just as Jesus had compassion, so are we called to turn our compassion for those who suffer into prayerful action and support of movements that seek to address the wrongful aspects of society that have become so obvious of late. In my meditations on this cycle of striving for civil rights, the image that has come to me again and again is the ocean. The waves move. They rise and crest, and then seem to fade, only to rise again. Our quest for a just society is not done. The wave is
rising though. May this wave rise higher, heal more hearts, and move us closer to the Kingdom that Jesus came to proclaim. I ask again: “Is anything too wonderful for the Lord.” Join me in a commitment to live out those words from the baptismal covenant, respecting the dignity of every person and striving for peace and justice. Say it with me I WILL WITH GOD’S HELP.

Amen

Eva Markham, Deacon
Christ Church Cathedral
June 14, 2020