

**August 22, 2004**  
**Dr. Lewis F. Galloway**  
**Genesis 18:1-15, Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16**

**“Another Way of Looking at the World”**

In Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* Alice finds an upside down world full of strange creatures and unusual experiences. Alice meets the White Queen who lives backwards, remembers things before they happen, and whose age is “a hundred and one, five months and a day.”

“I ca'n't believe that!” said Alice.

“Ca'n't you?” the Queen said in a pitying tone. “Try again: draw a long breath, and shut your eyes.”

Alice laughed. “There's no use trying,” she said: “one ca'n't believe impossible things.”

“I daresay you haven't had much practice,” said the Queen. “When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast...” (p. 233).

Sometimes the promises of God seem impossible to believe. There is so much around us that leads us to doubt the faith. As a congregation we are deeply committed to nurturing children, not only the children of our church family, but also the children of the community and the world. We strive to provide for children and their families by building Houses for Habitat, providing money for rent, food and utilities, caring for children in the Children's Circle and counseling children of divorce in the New Day program at the Center for Family Life Ministries. No matter how many children we protect from abuse, teach, shelter, educate, or feed, there always seems to be a greater need than we can meet. It is easy to get discouraged, to question the purposes of God and to lose hope.

We join with millions of Christians in this country and around the world in praying for peace. Yet, the world situation only seems to get worse. The killing continues between the Muslim north and the Christian south in the Sudan; Israelis and Palestinians refuse to come to a reasonable compromise; and there seems to be no end to the violence and conflict in Iraq. This past week, we as a community were shocked by the killing of a mother, a young policeman, and the wounding of our other officers before the deeply troubled man was himself killed. Our once confident faith begins to waver and threatens to collapse.

Our trouble trusting the promises of God comes not only from what we see around us, but also from what lurks within us. Grief, disappointment, doubt and fear exercise their pull on us like an immense black hole at the center of life. We know what happens to those who dare to love the enemy, who stand up for what is right, and who swim against the current of public opinion. We are tempted to trade the seemingly impossible promises of God for something less valuable but more believable. We are

like Alice who laughed and said, “There’s no use trying... one ca’n’t believe impossible things.”

Alice was not the only one to laugh at the impossible. Trusting in God’s promise of a new land and many descendants, Abraham and Sarah left their homeland. They wandered over the face of the land. Twenty-five years later, Abraham was nearly one hundred and Sarah was ninety. Still they had no children. Was it just a foolish dream? When they looked at their world, what did they see? Sarah was old and knew the signs. She looked at Abraham. She wasn’t very inspired by what she saw there. They were promised a child, but their childbearing years were over. They even learned to laugh about it. Hard tears. Bitter tears.

Abraham was sitting at the door of his tent, when three strangers came to visit. He quickly offered them his hospitality and provided a hasty feast for them. Then one of the strangers said that Sarah would bear a son. Sarah, who had heard everything from inside the tent, laughed out loud. Then the Lord asked why Sarah laughed, for nothing is too wonderful for the Lord. Sarah denied laughing; the Lord insisted that she did. You might say that God had the last laugh. He showed them another way of looking at the world. Sarah gave birth to a son and they called him Isaac, which means “laughter.”

When the fulfillment of God’s promises seems far off, it is easy to look at the world and think that what we see is all there is. It seems like the trouble we know will go on forever. It is too easy to think there is nothing new under the sun. We say that we put our trust in God, but we live as if our wits are all we have to help us muddle through. We mouth the words of faith, but we make uneasy compromises with the world. We keep a foot in each of two worlds and never make any spiritual progress. We are like roulette players who play red and black at the same time – never winning and never losing.

God gave Abraham and Sarah another way of looking at the world. By faith, they left their homeland; by faith, they wandered as strangers in the land they were promised; by faith, they received a son Isaac who became the ancestor of a great multitude. They knew by faith that God had something even greater in store for them. By faith, they knew that all their hopes and dreams would never be fulfilled within the span of their own lives. Faith taught them to desire a “better country, that is, a heavenly one.”

Hebrews invites us to join with them in looking at the world through the eyes of faith. In Hebrews (11:1) we read, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for; the conviction of things not seen.” Faith itself is the evidence we have that the promises of God are true. One writer has noted that the author of Hebrews is not “talking about what faith ‘feels like’ ...or establishes in the mind... rather... those who trust have in their possession, in effect, the title deed to what the person they trust will provide. They already have the “essence” of the thing they seek.” (p.383, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, David DeSilva). The experience of faith itself is down payment, the evidence, the guarantee, the title deed, to all that God promises to be true.

Through faith, we see the world as created by God, sustained by God and redeemed by God. We see that our hope is not in our own capacity for goodness or greatness, but in the goodness and greatness of God. We may accomplish a lot of things in life; we may have reason to be proud of our achievements; and we may live a good, useful and moral life. None of these things will give us the spiritual peace and security that faith in God can bring. We take hold of the promises of God through our faith. Faith is the only foundation strong enough to support us all the way through. Through faith, we come to know God's grace and God's salvation. The promises of God are certain. No matter what happens to us, nothing can take those promises away. By God's grace, we belong to God and we will be God's children forever.

Through faith, we come to look at the world in a new way. Luke Timothy Johnson notes that through faith we know that God continues to speak to us and "places a demand on our lives." Through faith we come to "perceive the world as mystery, as having a depth of being that lies within and beneath that which is observable, measurable, or calculable." ("The Scriptural World of Hebrews," Luke Timothy Johnson, *Interpretation*, July 2003). Through faith, we begin to believe the impossible promises of God and question the significance of what the world says is real. The perspective that faith gives us on the world does not deny the reality of evil or the terrors of life. It does not sugar coat human existence. The Bible speaks about a world in which the innocent suffer, misguided self-righteous religious people are as much of a threat as blatant sinners, and God's ways are not like our ways.

On one hand, the Bible is not for children: it speaks about famine, immorality, warfare, greed and ethnic hatred. On the other hand, the Bible is for the child in each one of us who dares, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary, to believe the promises of God. The Bible tells us how God in Jesus Christ has fulfilled the promise given to Abraham and Sarah so long ago. In Jesus Christ there is life for all people—Jew and Gentile—saint and sinner—you and me. The God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead can be trusted.

In the strength of faith we discover that the future is determined not so much by what we see as by what we believe. If we look at the world, we cannot see much beyond the grim reports of brutality, hunger and war. The world cannot give us lasting hope. Faith looks beyond the burdens we carry and the crises we face to the promises of God. The whole creation is in the process of being transformed. The future will be different from what we now see. The future belongs to God. We hope for more than what we see. We believe that one day Jews and Palestinians will live together in peace; Christians and Muslims will understand each other and put aside old wounds; war and terrorism will no longer be acceptable ways to resolve disputes; and friends can be reconciled, addictions overcome and families healed. What the world thinks is impossible is precisely what God has in mind.

The Christian faith is subversive. In our faith, we find the strength to live in the present on the basis of what God says will be. Christian faith casts doubts upon

everything this spiritually impoverished world holds true. We believe justice shall prevail, the poor shall inherit the earth, the grieving shall be comforted and the pure shall see God. We believe in a God who could take a boy named Joseph who was sold into slavery and use him to save from starvation the very ones who betrayed him. We believe in a God who called a runaway murderer named Moses to go back to the very place where he committed his crime and tell Pharaoh to let his people go. We believe in a God who could make a persecutor of the church named Saul into the great apostle of Jesus named Paul. We trust in a God, who took a humble girl named Mary and made her the mother of God. We trust in a God, who at the first light of dawn when everyone who plotted against Jesus was sleeping the contented sleep of the victorious, stole into the tomb and said, "Get up! Death is no match for you."

Faith gives us another way of looking at the world. In northern California there is a Catholic lay community that has taken as its mission caring for babies with AIDS. A reporter was visiting the community and interviewed a woman who was holding a desperately ill child in her arms. The woman told the reporter, "Her mother was a heroin addict and prostitute. This little baby was born with AIDS. She'll probably die soon."

The reporter asked, "Then why do you do this? I mean, why did you bring her up here if she is going to die?"

The woman replied, "So she will know life in its fullness."

The reporter asked incredulously, and with a tone of cynicism in her voice, "How can this pitiful baby know life in its fullness?"

The woman replied, "She will know that there are people in this world who love her." (Mark Trotter, *Windows to Truth*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1989).

We trust God who calls us to believe the impossible. When the promises of God seem impossible to believe, remember the words of the White Queen, "Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast..."