

**June 14, 2026—The Third Sunday after Pentecost**  
**The Rev. James Wyatt**

## **Responding to God**

The other day, I was looking at my Facebook memories, and I found this post I wrote 8 years ago: “Some of you might remember that when I started getting increasingly involved with the ministry work of St. Columba’s,” my home church in Kent, “I compared it to running into an old ex, finding that you still really hit it off, and wondering if maybe there was still a special sort of spark. Well, I’m still pretty sure that the work of ordained ministry is not for me.” Heh. “But I am also taking a week off from work to attend the College for Congregational Development, learning how to be a more effective Senior Warden. So let’s just say, spark or no spark, my ex and I are really good friends again.” So I shared that on Facebook, adding, “This did not age particularly well.” The comments on that post delighted me: “There were some of us who knew better,” said a friend from St. Columba’s. And “Glad things shifted!” said a member of St. John the Baptist. And “Thank goodness God had other plans,” someone from Faith wrote. And that made me think about Abraham and Sarah and their encounter with God that we read about from Genesis this morning. I can almost imagine God saying, “Why did James laugh, and say, ‘Shall I indeed return to ordained ministry, now that I am old?’ Is anything too wonderful for God?” Well, I didn’t *laugh*—“Oh yes, you did laugh,” says the Lord. OK, but I wasn’t laughing at you, God, I was laughing *with* you!

Well, now, like Sarah, I say, “God has brought laughter for me”—laughter not of scorn but of delight. Eight years ago, I had no idea I’d be up here decked out in a collar and fancy vestments, serving this amazing community. Not one single clue. “Is anything too wonderful for God?” And it’s particularly delightful because not only is today the first anniversary of my ordination as an Episcopal priest, but this Tuesday is also the thirtieth anniversary of my last Sunday serving my little Methodist churches in Ohio. I have to imagine—well, I have to trust, really—that God has had quite a good laugh about the winding road I’ve walked from there to here.

And it’s not just me, of course. God has a way of showing up in our lives, showing up on our doorsteps, and sending our lives in unexpected directions. For Abraham, it was, first, some unexpected guests making this hundred-year-old man run around in comical haste to get food and drink ready for them, and then the arrival of a new baby boy. Imagine trying to chase a toddler around at the age of a hundred and three! When God shows up on our doorstep, things can get a little crazy. And that’s to say nothing of Sarah’s perspective on this blessed event, getting pregnant and bearing a child at the age of ninety, long after she thought that was possible. Sometimes when God shows up in our lives, God comes with a pretty heavy burden for us to bear. But Sarah bore it with delight, and her disbelieving laughter turned into the laughter of joy. “God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.”

And sometimes when God shows up in our lives it is to remove the heavy burdens we carry. Jesus sent his disciples out to proclaim the good news—“The kingdom of heaven has come near”—and to “cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, [and] cast out demons.” Those are the concrete signs that the kingdom of heaven has come near—those are the manifestations of God’s presence. Sometimes God shows up to set things right where they have gone wrong, to bring healing and wholeness to God’s creation. And God invites us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus to participate in that work—to tend to those who are sick and in need, to care for those who are harassed and helpless, the lost sheep, who are wandering on the margins, with no shepherd to protect them from the wolves of the world.

Of course, sometimes God does not bring healing and wholeness when we are ill, sometimes God does not bring life when we or our loved ones are dying, sometimes God does not banish the demons that haunt and torment us. And that does not mean that God is absent. Our reading this morning from Paul’s letter to the Romans suggests that sometimes God shows up right in the middle of our suffering, causing us, as Paul says, to “boast in our sufferings.” I feel like it’s important to clarify what Paul is saying and what he’s not saying. He’s

not saying that God causes us to suffer in order to teach us endurance, and character, and hope in God's promises. And he's not saying that we are always *aware* of God's presence in the midst of our suffering. Too often, I think, this passage has been used to hurt people who are already suffering by suggesting that they're suffering wrong if they're not finding God in the midst of it—or at least building character as they patiently endure their suffering. What Paul *is* saying is that yes, sometimes people do encounter God in the midst of suffering. Sometimes hope does grow out of the endurance that communities find in suffering. Often God shows up in the midst of the struggle to bring an *end* to suffering—in the midst of our protests and our fights for justice and equality. And what Paul says very clearly, not here but a few chapters later on in his letter to the Romans, is that no suffering, no “affliction or distress or persecution or famine ... or peril or sword” (Romans 8:35) can separate us from the love of God. Nothing can put us out of God's reach.

I wonder, friends, where God is showing up in your life or in this community right now, and how each of us might respond. Is God showing up with a ridiculous promise that seems too wonderful to be true? Is God showing up with an invitation to join in the work of restoration and healing in this broken world? Is God showing up in the midst of pain and brokenness with words of quiet hope and comfort?

Wherever God shows up—for you, and for us as a community—I hope we all respond with hospitality, cultivating an openness within our own spirits to the experience of God's presence in any circumstance, even if that means running around in comical haste to get everything ready. I hope we respond with a readiness to join in proclaiming the good news with our words and our actions. I hope we respond with hope, trusting in the glory that awaits us. And I hope we respond with laughter—the joyful laughter of delight. Because nothing is too wonderful for God.

Thanks be to God.