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Last week we received a little relief in the weather with some rain, though some reported hail in the area, which made me think of a story about a young driver [who] was driving his car home and got caught in a bad hailstorm. His car was covered with dents. He took the car to the body shop to see how much it would cost to repair. He was dismayed with the news. The cost of repairs was just too high. He told the estimator that he could not afford the cost of the bodywork and asked if there was any other way to fix the car.

The estimator thought he would have a little fun with the young fellow. He told him that there was a possibility that he could take the dents out by blowing into the tailpipe as hard as he could. The pressure might just pop out the dents.

So the young man went home, waited for the car to cool off, and then blew into the tailpipe as hard as he could. He hoped the pressure would pop out the dents. He kept trying, but no dents seemed to be popping out.

The young man's father came home and saw him blowing on the tailpipe and asked what he was doing. The boy explained to his father what the estimator had told him. The father started laughing and told his son that he

had been fooled by the estimator. The young man was embarrassed and asked what was wrong with trying to fix the car this way. His father answered, "That should be obvious, son. You can't pop the dents out by blowing through the tailpipe like that. First you have to roll up the windows!"<sup>1</sup>

Whether or not hail dented your car last week, I imagine most of us have felt our lives a bit dented from time to time—when the hard knocks of life bump into us, leaving us feeling battered and bruised. When losses pile up in our lives, or when one moves from one location to another and feels disoriented, when illness invades our bodies, or when those we love ignore us or betray us, our lives may feel dented. In those times, we often do not feel like laughing, but it's possible that God invites us into Holy Laughter in these times of uncertainty.

I imagine Abraham and Sarah felt a bit dented, for in the opening biblical book of Genesis, we read about their journey from their homeland to an ambiguous destination, encountering conflicts and uncertainty along the way. Part of the deal that God made was that Abraham and Sarah would have

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numerous descendants, more plentiful than the stars in the sky, but partway along their journey, the narrator reminds us that they had no children. How do you have countless descendants if you don't have any children? You may recall that Abraham and Sarah decided to take matters into their own hands and agreed that the 86-year-old Abraham and their servant Hagar would have a child, who they named Ishmael.

At age 99, once again Abraham was reminded of God's promise, that he and Sarah would have a child, and in response, Abraham began laughing. Now we arrive at the story we heard read this morning.

Three visitors came to Abraham as he sat at the entrance of his tent. He offered them water to wash their feet as they rested in the shade under a tree. He asked his wife to make some bread, told a servant to prepare some meat, while he fetched some fresh milk and butter. He prepared quite a feast for these strangers, and while they ate, he stood near them.

One of the visitors inquired about Abraham's wife and indicated she would have a son by the time they returned next year. Sarah, who had been listening nearby, broke out in laughter, for she knew they were long past the age of childbearing. It would be like someone visiting your house this afternoon and suggesting you would have a child next spring—what would be your response? How many of you would laugh at such a humorous idea?

That's often how God seems to work in our lives—in surprising, and sometimes humorous ways. When our lives seem dented and bruised, God offers surprising healing. When we feel lost, God offers an unexpected pathway to wholeness. When our lives are filled with loss and sorrow, God offers surprising options that may prompt us to respond with holy laughter—utter delight for the new options God provides.

In the case of Abraham and Sarah, they experienced the surprising birth of their son Isaac, whose name in Hebrew means, "one who laughs." They had both laughed when told they would have a child, maybe not in denial of what God could do,

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but joining in Holy Laughter at the idea of outlandish possibilities. When Sarah first laughed in response to the news of having a child, she tried to deny her laughter, and I think we sometimes do the same thing. We sense a nudge that God has in mind for us, and we may respond with laughter, or even with denial.

Recently I attended a meeting where people gathered to talk about those who live in our communities without homes, and someone asked, “What can I do to help? How can I make a difference?”

One person who regularly visits those who are homeless replied, “You can join our group in visiting those who live under the bridges in our community, listening to their stories, and getting to know them.”

The person chuckled with embarrassed laughter and replied, “That’s not what I had in mind. I

couldn’t do that. Maybe I could just make a monetary donation to your group.”

When God nudges us to try something uncomfortable, we might laugh, sensing the humorous nature of what God offers. What might it be like to turn that uncomfortable laughter into Holy Laughter, seeing the invitation as an opportunity to try something new.

As a congregation, we’ve been trying something new over the past few years—worshiping remotely, worshiping together, letting go of the way we’ve always done things, trying something new. Along the way we may have experienced some chuckles, some nervous laughter, and God has turned our uncertain hesitation into Holy Laughter as we delight in being together. Even though we may not always know what’s coming, we can continue in Holy Laughter, knowing that God joins with us in the struggles and in the joy, often turning our fears into laughter, our struggles into joy.

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<sup>1</sup> Hodgins, Michael. *1002 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking* (p. 253). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #222.