

Sermon Thoughts Abridged
Genesis 25 : 7-11 THE PICNIC

This is the sum of the years of Abraham's life which he lived: one hundred seventy-five years. Then Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, the field which Abraham purchased from the sons of Heth. There Abraham was buried, and Sarah his wife. And it came to pass, after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac. And Isaac dwelt at Beer Lahai Roi.

The term picnic brings to mind images and thoughts of “a good time, a lunch, with others, outdoors.” The Bible never mentions picnics as such. Although it does describe the Feeding of the 4000 or The Feeding of the 5000, where everyone sat on the grass with food Jesus provided. Let's approach our text for today from the angle of searching “The Picnic.” Actually, the events of the text are somber—Abraham died.

About Abraham. Abraham was called by God to leave his homeland and his father's family when he was 75 years old. His wife Sarah was 65. He was to go to a new land. God would make Abraham and his wife Sarah into a great nation. In fact through Abraham all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3). Quite impressive promises! Abraham lived for 100 years in this land of promise. He grew wealthy. He had two sons. First Ishmael, born of Hagar, Sarah's maidservant. Sarah was barren and suggested that Abraham have a child through Hagar. By custom the child could rightfully be called Abraham and Sarah's. But Ishmael wasn't the heir God promised. When Abraham was 100 and Sarah 90, God granted Abraham and Sarah their own baby boy, named “Isaac”—“Laughter”—they were filled with joy! God was keeping His Word, as He always does.

Abraham lived another 75 years in the new land after Isaac was born. As our text says, he died at 175, *in a good old age, an old man and full of years*. His life had been full in terms of age, in terms of prosperity, in terms of family. His life had been good. But, really, how much of a picnic was it? Were times always good? What about the time he lied to Pharaoh king of Egypt saying that Sarah was his sister, not his wife, lest Pharaoh kill him and take her (Genesis 22), and was found out? Hardly something to remember with joy. What about the time he repeated and lied to Abimelech, king of Gerar, again saying that Sarah was his sister, and again he was found out? Less to be proud of there. What about his willingness in fathering a child through Hagar who was not his wife? Not what God wanted. No picnic there. It is true, there were joys--the birth of son Ishmael, although conceived by human conniving; and the birth of Isaac, Abraham and Sarah's own son, a son of promise conceived by a miracle of God. Then there was the great victory God gave him when he rescued Lot and all Lot's community from invading attackers. Plus the special joy when Isaac was spared on Mt. Moriah where God had sent Abraham to offer up his son. Yes, joys, but the years were not really a picnic. His dear wife Sarah had died 38 years before he did. What a change, as the death of a spouse always is. Finally, he never did get control of any of the land that God promised to give him, except for the burial plot he purchased for Sarah. His life was not a picnic.

This is true of us all. No matter what age you reach, no matter what successes you have, no matter which blessings God gives you, life is not greatness and a picnic. There are plenty of disappointments, health complications, mistakes, sins, to go around. Ultimately, there's death itself. The End of the Ride!--like the end of a carnival ride, the end of the train ride, or the end of vacation. The “picnic” ends.

Is the picnic in our text something else? Isaac and Ishmael together buried their father in the cave of Machpelah, where Abraham had buried Sarah. We are not told of direct friction between these two sons, but we do know that when Ishmael was a teenager and Isaac a youngster, Ishmael mocked Isaac. Sarah was upset. God told Abraham he needed to send Hagar and Ishmael away. Perhaps hard feelings continued between the sons? But here, they bury their father together. At times of grief and sadness, the family pulls together. Squabbles are laid aside and hearts are drawn into one. It's a blessing. In such a way the death of Abraham was a blessing for Isaac and Ishmael.

Yet it was not a pleasant time. Laying the earthly shell of their father to rest in the tomb—a cave in a field of dirt—earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, remembering God's words to Adam, “From dust you are and to

dust you shall return.” Their father was about to decompose. And what about that bundle of rags on the other side of the cave? The wretched remains of Sarah. Death was all around them. They knew it awaited them as well. This burial was not a picnic.

So for you, family burials are a blessing, getting everyone back together for a day or two. Yet funerals are a smack in the face to each and to all. “See what’s coming!” As much as I am now, as much as I think I am now, the reality is, death is coming. I’m just a few pounds of minerals and dirt from the ground—not smart, not strong, not special. I am going to die. I may pick up the pieces today, only to see them fall apart again. Not a picnic.

Let’s look further for the picnic in our text. *And it came to pass, after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac.* Is this a picnic in our text? That Abraham’s estate was passed on to Isaac—all of it—none to Ishmael, as God had earlier stipulated when Hagar and Ishmael had been sent away? Hardly. “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Matthew 16:26). Do not hungrily “greed” for your share of the estate when the folks pass on. Much sadness has been generated by family arguing over the inheritance. Material gain is really not the picnic for which you’re looking.

So where is the picnic in this text, or in our own lives? The real picnic in life as seen in our text, involves two things. The first: *Abraham was gathered to his people.* When Abraham died, he did not cease to exist. The soul, the life principle, that God breathed into Adam, as He did with Abraham and does with every human being, does not pass out of existence upon death. When Jesus was on the cross, He told the repentant thief, “Today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). When Jesus’ friend Lazarus died, Jesus told Martha, Lazarus’ mourning sister, “I am the Resurrection and the Life. He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die” (John 11:25-26). When God had promised Abraham that “All the families of the earth would be blessed!” God was saying that Jesus, the Savior, would come from Abraham’s family line. Jesus would reconcile the sinful world to the Father. Christ came to be punished for every sin of Adam, Abraham, and of yours. He successfully paid the price of death for Adam, for Abraham, and you. In Jesus forgiveness and the resurrection are Adam’s, Abraham’s, and yours. Does it become mundane and so-so after a while? Yet what if this afternoon you stand at death’s door—maybe an accident in the water right here at the park, or at home tomorrow in a freak accident you get caught in the bailer? How mundane and so-so then? Knowing that you are unworthy, a sinner, and God should banish you? BUT cling to Jesus tighter than ever before. “O death where is your sting? O grave where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the Law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 15:55-57). In Christ death is beaten!

Here’s the picnic: *Abraham was gathered to his people.* Walking through the doors of death is walking through the doors of life. Abraham’s soul went to be with every other child of God, our true family, our true people. That’s the picnic. Think of the joy and the pleasure! A picnic that never ends! Like a pleasant Sunday afternoon picnic spent with the Lord and His people, your friends, with no End of Ride ever! Though you fear death and do all possible to avoid death—God has built into you, a survival instinct—yet when that unknown hour comes, you enter the real church picnic! In Christ you will be gathered to your people!

There’s a second picnic in our text: *And Isaac dwelt at Beer Lahai Roi.* After Abraham’s burial, Isaac went to live at a place with a very strange name: *Beer Lahai Roi.* First the word *Beer* looks like “b-e-e-r,” doesn’t it? No wonder it’s a picnic, there’s beer! No, Nope. Stop. It’s the English rendering of the Hebrew word for “well” a two syllable word pronounced “beh-air.” Isaac went to live by the “Well *Lahai Roi.*” Living by water is a high priority. In this part of the country you understand that. *Lahoi Roi* “the One Who Lives and Sees Me.” This name was given to this well many years earlier by Hagar. Before she gave birth to Abraham’s baby Ishmael, she was in despair and had run away from Sarah. Sarah, surely jealous, was unkind to her. However, God was not ready to send Hagar out. He comforted her, assured her, told her that her son would prosper, and sent her back—He would be with her. No wonder she said, “the One Who Lives and Sees Me.” What a wonderful place for Isaac, forefather of the Savior, to live. He a sinner, whom God saw and knew all about, yet a sinner whom the living God did not put to death, but gave life. Isaac was under God’s care and under God’s loving, forgiving, and blessing hand. He was living at Beer Lahai Roi—the well of the one who lives and sees me. That is a picnic on earth for God’s child.

That is also your picnic right now. Until the time comes, when God calls you to “be with your people,” you live on this earth with Jesus at the well Be-er Lahai Roe, “Well of the One Who Lives and Sees Me.” There you have peace. There you will prosper. In Jesus you have also have the picnic of God’s people, the church, on earth!

So be it! Amen!

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