

I heard you say you look out for the feet of clay
That someone will be falling next
Without the chance for last respects...

So go the lyrics of the song “When Heroes Go Down” by Suzanne Vega. The song is a meditation upon events that seem rather common; those moments when what we thought was a man or woman of integrity is shown to be a charlatan, or a fraud.

But what of those heroes that began with feet of clay? What of those we knew from the beginning were of questionable character? Open the Bible, and you will be faced with myriad examples of this. Consult your bulletin and we can see such an example this morning.

We read this morning of the announcement that Abraham and Sarah will be blessed with a child. This is a fascinating reading with any number of reasons to call for our reflection, and study. But one small aspect of this passage has stuck with me.

It is an easy piece of information to miss. It seems that the very folk in the story passed right over the moment, too. But it seems well worth our consideration.

This morning we hear about Sarah, the matriarch of Judaism. In our six-year cycle of Lectionary readings we hear of Sarah only 8 times. This particular story we hear only twice. The distinct verse that troubles me is read just one time, one time in six years.

Chapter 18, verse 15 says this:

But Sarah denied, saying, “I did not laugh”;
for she was afraid. He said, “Oh yes, you
did laugh.”

I checked 17 English translations of this verse. Sixteen of them tell us that Sarah denied laughing, just like our reading our reading this morning. But one, just one single translation, was brave enough to translate Sarah's statement accurately by saying clearly, "Sarah lied". The narrative makes it clear that she lied. But the Hebrew itself also states distinctly that Sarah lied.

To make matters worse, the text suggests that she is lying to God. God asks why Sarah laughed. Sarah responds by lying, "I did not laugh." God responds simply by saying, "Oh yes, you did laugh."

Our passage this morning jumps from the 18th chapter directly to the couples' praises in chapter 21 after the birth of Isaac. But, if we were to continue to read in the 18th chapter we would see that the fact that Sarah lied to God is more or less ignored.

God speaks, "Oh yes, you did laugh." and then the narrative immediately begins the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Nothing is made of Sarah's dishonesty. We never hear about this transgression again. It simply is set aside. Over the centuries Sarah is remembered as a good and righteous woman. She is lauded as a spiritual hero, her dubious grasp of integrity not withstanding.

But why should Sarah be any different than so many other biblical heroes? Her own husband was a liar as well. At least twice he passes Sarah off as his sister, rather than his wife, to avoid troubles. But there are other examples, of course. Jacob was a con man. Noah had a drinking problem. Lot offered his own daughters up to the violent crowd in Sodom. Moses was a murderer. David was an adulterer, *and* murderer.

Of course, such paradoxical figures are also known in the New Testament. Peter denied Jesus, not once, but three times.

James and John were arrogant and power hungry. Paul terrorized the early church.

In our faith we do not need to look for feet of clay to seek who will fall next. Instead our faith teaches us our heroes have clay feet. It is, in many cases, the very fact that they have clay feet that they are heroes.

It certainly is the fact that because they have clay feet that we can revel in God's grace. There is not a sin you could commit, a transgression you could practice, a commandment you could break that one of our heroes hasn't already.

No sin is unforgivable. There is no limit to God's grace.

Well, save one: the limit we place on God's grace. The only unforgivable sins we carry are the ones we will not accept that God has already forgiven.

Do you have feet of clay? Do you have guilt-stained hands? Do you have a heart of fear? Fear not! Praise God, for you are in great company!