

Genesis 22:15-18 and Hebrews 6:13-20

“God’s promises always come true”

These past two Sundays have been a reassuring elixir for me, as someone who needs to see and understand the presence of God in very real tangible ways. I’m a lot like Thomas who said unless I see his hands and feet with the nail holes, and his side with the spear mark in it, I will not believe. These past two Sundays were the reassurance of God’s faithfulness for me. It reminded me that we always live in the gracious shadow of God’s promises.

Easter wasn’t just the sanctuary being filled front to back, but did you notice a spirit of the living God present with us during worship? We have that promise of Scripture in Matthew 18:20 that tells us where two or three gather in my name, there I am with them. We had two or three hundred and God was present.

Similarly for youth Sunday the clear work and dedication of the kids, the value of worship, the intensity of their work not as a performance but as a sacrifice and a dedication of their love for their Savior. We have a promise in the Shema in Scripture in Deuteronomy 6 that tells us that if we pass our faith along to the future generations then God promises to make himself known and felt to them. We were the beneficiaries of that over these past two weeks. God made himself known to us in very clear ways that left me, at least, reassured of God’s presence and standing firm on his promises once again.

Both of our Scriptures address the faithfulness and the reliability of God’s promises. One in a story about Abraham and his son Isaac, a story we all need to know because it helps us understand who Jesus is and what we have received as a result of the sacrifice of a son on behalf of a father. Our Christian faith is anchored in the unchangeable reliability of God. We believe in God’s promises and so as a result we can obey even the most difficult commands. Let’s read our second Scripture. Just a heads up, it may seem a bit confusing, but stay with it, and we’ll see how it makes sense during our time together.

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So what are some of the most familiar promises that we have in Scripture. What are some that you are aware of? Noah and the rainbow where God not only gives us a promise that he will never destroy humanity again, but an actual sign, something concrete and visible that when we see the world in the condition in which it is today, we see a rainbow and we can say, okay, God promised that we would not be destroyed, even for our disobedience. Even if we make ourselves like God, even if we think that we are as powerful God and can make decisions

that turn the world upside down, that rainbow reminds us as followers of Jesus that no one can change the promise of God that he will never destroy us, no matter how much we deserve it, and it sure seems like now more than ever we deserve it.

I love Joshua hearing from God be strong and courageous, why, because I will not leave you or forsake you, as I was with Moses so I will be with you. We can jump to the New Testament where we hear all things work together for good, for whom? For those who trust in the Lord, for those who love God. Romans 8:28. We hear in Jeremiah the promise that God will make us a new covenant that will be written upon our hearts. I love that promise.

But there is arguably no greater promise in all of Scripture than that one that God gives to Abraham. It is a great promise because it is an impossible one to fulfill. Abraham is 99 years old and God tells him that through you, if you obey me, don't forget that part, if you obey me, Abraham, I will make of you a great nation and all nations on the face of the earth will be blessed through you. Two part promise. You will become a great nation, and you will be a blessing to all nations. Sarah was also in her 90's, so the longer time went on, the less possible was that promise.

Then we have this story of Isaac, after the promise has been fulfilled, that puts in jeopardy this very promise that God has made to Abraham. Have you ever felt that way? God you promised me, at least I understood, that this was my calling was to work in this certain place, or to do this certain thing and you get there and you wonder why in the world did God put this on my heart? I am blessed that I have never felt that way where I have served. God has been present and has been clearly shown in ways that have been reaffirming to me that God's call to me and the church have been confirmed repeatedly.

But here God tells Abraham to take his son, his beloved son, his only son, the son of the promise of the covenant, and sacrifice him, kill him, kill the promise. What does Abraham do? He obeys. Okay, that is problematic, I know, a father sacrificing his son. Hmmm, where else in Scripture do we read about a father sacrificing his son and as a result all of humanity is impacted? Right? This is why we need to know the Isaac story because it is such a clear parallel to the sacrifice of the Father and the victory of the Son that we just celebrated this past Easter. But we pick up our first Scripture after Abraham agrees to sacrifice Isaac, after the angel of the Lord holds his hand with the knife so that Isaac is saved. And the angel tells Abraham, listen to

this as if it is directed to you: vs. 16, because you have done this, because you have obeyed me Abraham, and were willing to sacrifice your son, your only son, I will bless you.

Abraham, you believed in God's promise even when the promise itself was in jeopardy. You see, obedience doesn't impact God's faithfulness, but it does make a difference on how we can live out those promises. We see that with Moses. God promises Moses that he will take the people of Israel to the promised land. The people disobey, Moses disobeys, Moses doesn't take the people, but the people do enter through the hand of Joshua.

In our Hebrews Scripture we read about the promises of God coming true. In vs.19 we read that we have a hope in Jesus that God's promises will and do come true. Today I want you to leave this sanctuary completely assured that God's promises will come true in your life, but that your obedience will impact how you will experience those promises. We can see this if we go back to this parable of faith that is so evident in Hebrews. We have this parable of Jesus the son revealed in creation and through the promises of Abraham in vs.13-15 but then he comes to earth and Jesus reveals to us that hope which is found in the fact that places him both in the holy of holies and on the streets of Jerusalem.

We have our hope in Jesus in that he is both God and man. That parable then extends again as we know that in his resurrection he sits at the right hand of God, or as Hebrews states, he entered the inner shrine behind the curtain in the holy of holies. This all points to the impossibility of God going back on his promises because it is so antithetical to who God is. The concept I want all of us to leave with today is It is impossible for one who is God to lie.

Why do we need to hear that today? Because we find ourselves in a time where promises made are no longer worth the air that it takes to say them. Today there are no commitments that seem worth keeping in society or in the world. There are only bargains or deals that we make with each other. Are there real commitments between husband and wife? When things go poorly how quickly are we to look for the exit, those vows, well, they are good for as long as you feel like you can put up with it.

There are no real commitments between husband and wife, parent and child, worker and employee, church and member, political leader and the people that they serve. We just make deals with each other and when one party feels betrayed then they just move on. No, Jesus promised, so we respond. That is the relationship that we have with our Savior. We trust in Jesus, in God we trust. Where there is no commitment then there is no lasting hope, just a

ceaseless jockeying of position. But in Hebrews we read that we have a hope that built and established upon the person of Jesus Christ. If we trust in God's commitment to you, then you have hope and peace.

What promises of Scripture do you need to hear today?

I will gather you under my wings as a mother hen gathers her chicks. Who wants to feel God's embrace today? We have the promise that we will feel it, that we will be protected.

What about vengeance is mine, says the Lord. That is a promise that reminds us that we are not to seek out retribution or violence, God's justice will occur, but not in the way that we may think or want. Some of us will need to hear that today.

The Lord will protect the widow and the orphan the stranger and those who are hungry and thirsty. Those are promises that motivate us to work for the widow and the orphan and the hungry and the thirsty and the stranger and to be on their side, if there are lines drawn in the sand.

What about the promise that Jesus is the prince of peace. I need to hear that God is a God of peace and that no matter who we are we are called to live for peace. If we are to choose sides we are always to choose the side of peace, and righteousness. That is a no brainer. God's promises always come true, including his promise of peace, so why not be on God's side?

My prayer for all of us in this time of uncertainty is that we will always trust in the promises of God, for they always come true. Believe it. Amen.