

"Promises, are here all the time" - Genesis 12:1-9

The Word of God through which the Holy Spirit guides our hearts and minds today is recorded in the First reading of today: Genesis 12:1-9

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who has brought us together”. Amen

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Brothers and sisters in Christ; our world is filled with promises. “When we were young or in the stage of romantic love we make promises such as “I will love you forever.” Then during our wedding we vow before God and the congregation to love each other till death parts us. “But in today’s society when relationships are so fragile, absolute promises are hard to keep. There has got to be the affirmations such as, “I love you and I want to spend the rest of my life with you,” but, “I will love you forever” is not something that happens in all modern day relationships given the ratio of divorces in the USA and Canada.”

Yes, the world is filled with promises: We made promises in our economy, business, legal system, medical system, and politicians made promises during an electoral campaign. There are promises to repay a debt, promises to pay bills, promises of children to do their homework and clean their rooms, promises to fix something in the house when you get around to it, promises to visit people and spend more time with the family.

There are also promises made in the Church. Confirmands promise to remain faithful to the Christian faith, even to the point of death. Leaders of the Church make promises about how they will be an example of Christian living for the members, how diligently they will conduct the business of the congregation, and how they will uphold the doctrine of the Church. And yet, as much as we are making promises all over the place, it needs to be understood that our relationship with God is not based upon our promises to God, but it is based on God's promises to us. This promise is coming from Him to us. He is faithful were we are faithless. He is sincere where we are often liars. He works when we are lazy. He is wise despite our foolishness. He continues to build His Church in spite of our many divisions and feeble efforts.

Really, there is only one promise from God. It is the promise to save, to deliver from death, to rescue from sin and every evil, hidden under the promise to destroy the devil. Right after Adam and Eve sinned. God says "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed; He shall crush your head and you shall strike his heal."

That is the Promise around which all the promises of God revolve and draw their meaning, the promise that God would work salvation through the seed of the woman; that He would rescue fallen Adam by a Seed, a Son, who would get between us and devil, making us reconciled children of God instead of enemies.

The Old Testament is the history of the Promise. In it we hear how God has worked in, with, and under human history to plan our salvation. We learn how God worked through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to establish His covenant and to conceive a people who would serve as His instrument of salvation to the world. We see how God created a nation called "Israel," named after the father of the children of Israel, Jacob, who "wrestled with God." The Lord shaped and molded this nation over the long centuries and delivered from it His Promise, our Savior Jesus Christ.

Friends, there was a purpose and reason to everything, it happened so that the Christ would one day be delivered in Bethlehem, baptized in the Jordan, crucified on the cross of Calvary, and raised from the tomb. Everything that happened in the Old Testament, down to the smallest detail, happened "for us and for our salvation," that in Christ the entire world would be rescued from death and damnation.

The question then is how do we receive the blessings and benefits of God's promise? By nature, we are not looking for God's blessing. We are not that concerned about His promises. By nature we are enemies of God. We usually blame Him for our troubles and trust in what we can provide for ourselves. We trust in a good education for a good job and good income. We trust in a good medical system for health, fertility, and well-being. We trust in our government and private pension plans to provide a secure future. We trust in business to provide safe and usable products.

Now those things are not bad. In fact, they too are blessings from God. But we often separate them from God. We think that these man-made systems operate without God's blessing and support, independent of God. Then we no longer look to God for a blessing, but to what our hands have made. The true test of our trust would be the test of Abraham or the test of Job, if God took these things all away.

If our economy and government were destroyed by war, would we loose faith, or would we continue to look to God to find a means to bless us? That was Abraham's first test. God told him, leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. Once Abraham left his country, people and relatives, he had no one but God to lean on. There was no promise but God's promise. All Abraham had to cling to was the Word of God, the Promise that the Lord would make this seventy-five year old man and his

sixty five year old wife with no children into a great nation, with descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as sand on the sea shore. By that time their names were Abram and Sarai. They would come to laugh at God's promise. They each laughed so hard, they named their only son Isaac, which means, "he laughs," for God always gets the last laugh.

God promised that He would make Abram's name great, and that He would be blessed to be a blessing. Could Abram ever have realized how large that blessing would be? Could he have known when he pulled up his tent pegs in Haran that a bunch of Gentiles halfway around the world, here in Strathroy, Ontario would call Abram "Father Abraham"?

God promised blessings on those who blessed Abram, and curses on those who cursed him. And, it was because he bore the Seed, the Promise, the Christ. To bless Abram was to bless Christ and be blessed by Him. To curse Abram was to curse Christ and to be cursed by Him. In Abram, all the peoples of the earth would be blessed, for in the loins of Abram was the Promise. Abram was a promise bearer and through the Promise that he bore the world would be blessed. Abram, in reality, never saw anything of the greatness of God's promise. He never saw himself become a great nation. He never saw his name become great. He never saw all people of the earth blessed through him. Abram simply believed God. He took God at His Word. He trusted the promise of God, "and it was credited to him as righteousness."

The Old Testament gives us the long view of God's Promise in Christ. We see some of the things that were done to lay the groundwork for our salvation in Christ. Abram and Sarai move and wander. A nation needed to be formed and shaped. A land needed to be staked out. A family line need to be identified and isolated. All so that Jesus Christ could one day be born in Bethlehem, grow up in Nazareth, preach in Galilee, die on a cross in Jerusalem, be raised from the dead on the third day, send His apostles to preach repentance and forgiveness in His name to all nations, and ascend to the right hand of His Father to intercede for us and be present with us.

That is the impact of the Scripture's teaching of God's election in grace - that God has been at work in, with, and under all the details of history from all eternity - planning, coordinating, moving people here and there, arranging marriages, granting children, setting up governments, toppling governments, causing famines and earthquakes and floods and fires, mobilizing migrations and waging wars. All so that the Word of the Promise, the Gospel of God's mercy toward sinners in His Son might be fulfilled and preached to all people, to us here, now, today.

God was at work from all eternity for that very moment, when you would be sitting

here, in this church, today, being called, and gathered, and enlightened by the Promise of forgiveness and eternal life in Jesus Christ. And this brings us to the question "why?" When tragedy happens, we wonder why? When "bad" things happen to "good" people, we wonder why? When bad things happen to us, we wonder why?

We may be lead into despair and doubt. We may become depressed and angry. We charge God with forgetfulness, as if He has lost His memory and had forgotten His promise. We accuse Him of being irrelevant, out of touch, off in another world, out there somewhere instead of right here with us. We say, "He doesn't care about me." But the answer that comes back from the long view of the Scriptures is that God is in the midst of things, and has been there all along, ordering everything down to the minutest detail toward the goal of our salvation in Christ.

That's what it means when St. Paul writes in the 8th chapter of Romans: "We know that in everything God works for good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." God's purpose is salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus, not our personal convenience, happiness, or contentment, but salvation - rescue from sin, death, devil, the condemnation of the Law, the wrath of God. That's the goal, and that's what He's up to.

And so in a very real sense we can say that Abram and Sarai moved from Haran to the land of Canaan so that Jesus might reach down from the right hand of God to come to us this morning to gather us around Word and Sacrament in a place we call Grace Lutheran Church, to deliver the blessings of His Promise to us. He comes to give us His words of Spirit and life bringing forgiveness, His true body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. He has brought us to this time and this place for a purpose - to save us, to claim us, to forgive and cleanse us.

Friends, we forget our promises but God never forget His Promise; the promise He made to Abraham and his children forever. He remembers His promise to you in your Baptism; that you belong to Him and He belongs to you, that Jesus' death and resurrection and righteousness are yours. He remembers His promise that He will bless you, forgive your sins in the name of Christ, and raise you from the dead on the last day. Amen

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord, and Savior. Amen.