

Written Copy: Genesis 9:15-17 "The God Who Keeps His Promises"

9th Sunday @ Pentecost: Proper 12

Sunday, July 25th, 2021

Text: Genesis 9:15-17

¹⁵ I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." ¹⁷ God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

The text's intent

To assure the Noah and the generations after him that as the LORD promised to destroy the earth in a flood but save Noah and his family, so too He will keep His promise about never destroying the world in a flood again, even though sinful unbelief will appear and grow once again. And the LORD gives the rainbow as the visible sign and symbolic intercessory between God and man, that despite man's sin God will be patient and continue in this time of grace until the one promised that will save the world from its sin has come.

Focus Statement:

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, so He makes loving promises that He always keeps. Just as He promised to save Noah and the animals in His gift of the ark His mighty power kept that promise. Out of His love for His creation, even though Noah's descendants would fall into sin He promised never to destroy them again by a flood and gave a visible confirming sign. He saved mankind in the flood so that His greater sign of steadfast love might be seen in Jesus' death and resurrection, which creates the ark of the Church by which repentant sinners are kept safe until the end of this world and the restoration of all things.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We are a people who make promises and commitments that we either can't or won't keep. We forget there are limits to what we can follow through on. And because of our own sinful desires and plans, lacking the steadfast love we have been given in Christ, we fail to keep our promises to others, especially to forgive others as Jesus forgives us. As those who make, and break promises we can at times doubt God's promise keeping and steadfast love for us.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Just as we can look to the rainbow and be assured the LORD is keeping His promise never to destroy the world in a flood, we can look to the cross and to the resurrection as the sign that God's steadfast love for us will never fail as He sends His Spirit to keep us in the ark that is His Church to life everlasting.

Subject Sentence: Our God is faithful in keeping all His promises

Introduction: Your Word is Your Bond?

This is the day and age when Hollywood, seemingly strapped for original ideas, remakes the stories and tales of old. Often, they don't live up to the promise of making the tale better and bigger because in doing so they lose track of the original story. But there is one that comes to mind, at least in my opinion, that lived up to and surpassed the original telling on the big screen. The movie I'm thinking of was a modern-day real-character remake of the classic Disney cartoon "Peter Pan." It was called "Hook" and came out in 1991 directed by Stephen Spielberg and starred Robin Williams as Peter Pan who had grown up and forgot who he was, and with that forgot how to fly. The part of the movie plot that I want to call your attention to is the very beginning of the movie where we see what Peter Pan has become. Peter Pan, who was a "lost boy" living in the magical place called Never Neverland, where kids never grow up, during one of his visits to our world, decided to stay and was adopted by a regular family. He became "Peter Banning" and grew up to be the opposite of what Peter Pan was. He became an unimaginative workaholic lawyer who doesn't even have time for his own kids. Instead of watching his daughter's dance recital, which incidentally and unknowingly for him is the story of Peter Pan, he chooses to answer his cell phone and schedule a meeting, interrupting the recital for other parents, and missing his daughters' part. But his worst offense against his children comes when he promises his son Jack that he will absolutely make it to his baseball game. He tells Jack, "My word is my bond." But when the game starts, Jack's father Peter is not there. Eventually an assistant from the office shows up with a video recorder to record the game for Peter, but this only serves to emphasize how badly Peter has failed.

Watching that movie as an adult, that phrase "My word is my bond" and Peter's subsequent failure to keep that promise stood out to me when I watched it with my kids, and still does so today. How many times did I, as a father, promise to attend something with my kids, or do something with them, but allowed work to get in the way? And on top of my work, when I was also a Deacon working as the part time Parish Assistant at my home Church, how many times did I allow those responsibilities to prevent me from my promise and call to fulfill my role as "Dad"? Not being there for weekend activities or school events, not being there just to play ball with them. And when I was there physically not always being there mentally. That phrase, "My word is my bond" still haunts me today and dredges up guilt in my heart.

How about you? Does that phrase “My word is my bond” ring in a similar way in your life? Maybe you’ve never said that particular phrase, but how many times have you promised to do something for a family member or a friend yet failed to follow through on it? Maybe it was something you never should’ve promised, something you ended up not being able to follow through on because of things out of your control. But then there are those times when you actually could follow through on your promise but chose not to. Perhaps the sacrifice it would take ends up being too great. Other things that you would rather do come up, or you feel too tired, and so you bow out by making excuses.

Then there are those promises we make to God. Promises that we will read His word more, pray more, be a better witness in the world through word and action. Yet we find those promises come with a price we are not always willing to pay. And there is the promise we make every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer, asking the Lord to “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” How many times do we fail to follow through on forgiving others when they do something that offends or hurts us? What would it look like if our God was as fickle with forgiveness as we sometimes are? Our inherent inability to make “our word as our bond” as sinful human beings can affect how we see our Lord in regard to His promises. When we fail to love and forgive our fellow man, our sinful heart prodded by the devil whispers in our ear wanting us to believe that Jesus has had enough of us and is done granting us grace. Thankfully we have the example of the Flood to convince us otherwise.

God’s Steadfast Love Keeping Promises in OT

The flood is all about God keeping His promises because His Word is His bond. In the time leading up to the flood the world became filled with evil in an even greater amount than it is today. It had gotten so bad that no one believed in God, or worshiped God, or sought to live in love toward others. Instead their hearts were bent on violence and evil all day long. So the LORD gave mankind an ultimatum in **Genesis 6:3 Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years."** God is saying that He is giving mankind 120 years to turn away from sinful unbelief and turn back to him. It had gotten so bad that **(Genesis 6:5-6) ⁵ The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶ And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. (Genesis 6:8) But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.**

Noah himself wasn't perfect. He wasn't sinless. But the favor that He had in the eyes of the LORD came from the faith that He had in the LORD and His promises. He believed the LORD to be a gracious and merciful God who loved and cared for him, and who he worshiped as such. Noah demonstrated that great faith before this evil sin-filled world when for 120 years he obeyed God's command to build an ark. He believed that through the means of this ark the LORD would protect him from what the LORD promised would come. **Genesis 6:11-14** ¹¹ **Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence.** ¹² **And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.** ¹³ **And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth.** ¹⁴ **Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch.** The LORD showed that His Word is His bond and that He keeps His Word. He said that He was going to destroy the world in a flood and that came to pass. The water stored in the depths of the earth and the water from the sky that encircled the earth cause a worldwide flood that covered even the highest mountain peaks. The LORD said He would destroy the earth and He made it happen.

But the LORD also showed His steadfast love for righteous believing Noah and for His creation. **Genesis 6:17-19** ¹⁷ **For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die.** ¹⁸ **But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.** ¹⁹ **And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark to keep them alive with you. They shall be male and female.** Just as He promised, He saved Noah and a representation of all the animals of Creation by means of the ark. He gave to Noah and his sons the specifications for building the ark, the tools with which to do it, along with the materials, the strength, and the perseverance of faith. In an evil world that continued on living in sin and laughing at what it saw as Noah's foolish undertaking, Noah and his sons worked for 120 years and by God's grace finished it just in time. The LORD brought to Noah two of every kind of animal and moved them to climb aboard. Then finally just before the deluge of water hit, Noah and his family entered the ark and the LORD shut the door behind them, ensuring that they would survive while the world around them perished.

The LORD out of His steadfast love kept His promise to save them by keeping them safe in that ark despite the massive amounts of water destroying everything around them and below them. He guided the ark and kept it afloat during the 40 days and nights of nonstop rain. He kept them safe for the ensuing 150 days the water continued to surge and cover the earth. And then the LORD kept His promise of love and faithfulness to all upon the ark by causing a great wind to blow which served to dry up the earth, sending that flood of water back into the ground from where it had come as well as evaporating it into the sky. The LORD guided the ark and set it down safely and upright on the mountains of Ararat in what is now modern-day Turkey. The LORD kept His promise by keeping man and animal safe for the entire year that they were locked away in the ark, until the LORD called them to come out.

Noah and his family and the animals walked out onto a vastly different world. The plants were no longer able to sustain Noah and family alone so that meat would need to be added to their diet. The wild animals would now be fearful of man, yet Noah and his descendants would need to subdue them. And now there would be rain as a daily part of the water cycle. You can imagine after what they had been through how rain would make Noah and his family worry that the flood was about to happen again, especially since Noah's descendants quickly turned back to sin and unbelief. But our God is a gracious and merciful God. So He over and over again promises that He would most certainly never again destroy all mankind and animals by flood waters. And to prove He is a God who keeps His word He set a sign in the clouds to remind mankind of His faithful love, to remind us that His word is His bond. Even to this day, whenever the rains come one can see the rainbow in the clouds. We see it, and can be assured that God sees it, and is telling us that despite our faithlessness, His Word is still His bond,

God's Steadfast Love Keeping Promises in Christ

It was the LORD acting out of His steadfast faithful love to Noah and his family that spared them because they were in right standing with Him by faith. But they were in right standing because He had given them that faith and kept faith alive in their hearts. He did so in order to save a remnant from destruction. He saved Noah and his family in order that through them He could give to all men an even greater sign than the rainbow. From Noah's son Shem would come the One who would make all people in right standing with God. The One promised right after mankind fell from grace in the garden when the LORD, out of steadfast faithful love promised to send an offspring of Eve who would end the power that sin, death, and the devil had grabbed over mankind. And that one to come was Jesus.

Jesus' death and resurrection stands as an even greater sign of God's steadfast love that is the driving force for Him to make and keep His promises to you. The Father sent the Son who joined Himself with humanity as that offspring of Eve, so that he could be the sacrifice that makes all men, including you and me right with Him. Jesus came to forgive all the times we make promises to one another and to God and fail to keep them. He came to forgive all the times when our lives look less like Noah and more like the wicked unbelievers of His time. Out of the steadfast love of God Jesus fulfilled His promise to give His life in death so that we might not die eternally but be forgiven, even for those times when we struggle to forgive one another. Our God loves you too much to see you wind up spending eternity apart from Him. Jesus' death and resurrection stands as the greatest and most clear and certain sign of that great and faithful love that surpasses all understanding that God has for you and for me.

God's Word is His bond in your life

And He keeps that promise alive in you personally by sending His Spirit into your life in baptism to create faith in your heart. And He renews that the faith through the Gospel Message. He comes in that message to continue to reassure you that His word is His bond. He comes in the Gospel as Paul says in **Ephesians 3:17-19** ¹⁷ **so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith---that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.** The steadfast love of God as witnessed in Jesus Christ's salvation work for you is beyond human comprehension. We can only begin to grasp it when the Spirit reveals it to us through God's Word and promise. And the Spirit shows us in that Word that our LORD has always kept His promises. We can be sure of the greatest promise to come: Eternal Life.

God's word is His bond in Your life. He comes to you to be with you in times of trouble just as He was with His disciples on the boat. He had not forgotten them up on that mountain in prayer but was watching over them all along. And at just the right time He came to them. **Mark 6:50 for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."** His words have the power to do what they say. He came and gave them courage. He comes to you when you cry out to Him and gives you the courage and strength to carry on, just as He has promised He would. And in His own time and way He removes that trouble from your midst. He does all that not because you earn it or deserve it. But because His steadfast love for you endures forever. Because He always keeps His promises.

Conclusion

Is your word your bond? Probably not as often as you'd like it to be. Even though we continue to make promises that we shouldn't, our Savior remains faithful to all that He has promised us. His Word is His bond. Even when we struggle to forgive our fellow man, He forgives us and gives to us His steadfast love by which we find the power and strength to do what we by ourselves are unable to do. As Paul states in **Ephesians 3:20-21** ²⁰**Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,** ²¹**to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.** Our Lord Jesus Christ makes promises and keeps them like no one else can. You may doubt the promises others make to you, but you should never doubt the promises you have in Jesus Christ. As we sang in our Sermon Hymn "Great is Thy faithfulness Lord unto me". His steadfast love for you never ends. And by the strength of that love He has sealed you in baptismal faith so that you rest safely and securely in His ark which is His Church. In this ark He will keep you in steadfast faith unto life everlasting. It's His sure promise to you. Amen.