

2018 NL1 WK2 Genesis 12 Abraham  
18-09-16 Genesis 12:1-9

God's beloved people, grace and peace to you in the name of our crucified and risen Savior,  
Jesus Christ.....Amen.....

The start to the lectionary this year is full of promises and covenant stories. Promises are often easy to make, but not always so easy to keep.

Some people say, "A promise is a promise." And that's all they need to faithfully keep it.

One of my friends who's in business says, "I always under promise and over deliver!"

Another business mind, Seth Godin, says, "Making promises and keeping them is a great way to build a brand." It's also a great way to be a... parent..., friend..., student..., neighbor..., citizen..., disciple..., and all around good person!

The psalmist quotes God saying, "*I will not violate my covenant, or alter the word that went forth from my lips.*" Ps. 89:34

And for the sarcastic among us when promises don't go the way we had hoped, "Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you meant what you promised. // Silly me."

We live in a world that surrounds us with promises. Some of them get kept and others don't. In our social lives..., family lives..., work..., school..., government..., financial.... all aspects of our lives people tell us things.

God is the same way..... God makes promises..... Last week God promised Noah and all of us that never again would God destroy the world in the waters of a flood..., though to the people in the Southeast it may feel like it after Florence.

Still God promised not to forsake his people. Pastor Alison called that story a re-creation story. God made things new. And the difference between God's promise and any other promise, is that we know, no matter what, God will keep it.

This week God re-creates again, [re-re-creates??] and makes good on the promise not to start completely from scratch. God chooses Abram and Sarai..., whom we know as Abraham and Sarah, and gives them a commissioning and a promise.

And it is God's. defining. Promise. in all of scripture. The rest of the Bible is basically stories of God keeping his promise to the people even as his people... wander and stray... and worship... and....sin. When God promises....., it defines and commits both God and us. God WILL keep his promises. Will we believe and take comfort?

A modern day theologian, Walter Brueggemann, says about God, "The promise is God's power and will to create a new future / sharply discontinuous with the past and the present. The promise is God's resolve to form a new community / wrought only by miracle / and reliant only on God's faithfulness. Faith as response / is the capacity to embrace that announced future with such passion / that the present can be relinquished for the sake of that future."

God called to Abram and Sarai, "Go...."

And God made promises saying, "I will...."//

And they went.

There are so many remarkable things about these 4 verses in Genesis. Leading up to it we are told that Sarai is barren..., living in Haran with Abraham's people, and God speaks to Abram..... "Leave it all, and I will...."

"God's promise to a barren, landless couple is pregnant with hope. The barrenness signifies hopelessness, an end. And into that desert of despair, God brings a promise / and holds

it up in the face of barrenness / that shows a fight against futility..., standing up in the face of fear..., and giving hope in the land of despair.” KS

“Go.... from your country... kindred and ... father’s house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup>I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

“You go.... I will.... So that....”

This is a re-creation story. God is promising life out of barrenness.

This is a resurrection story. God is promising new life out of death.

And this is a story of purpose. “So that you will be a blessing.”

God’s love..., plan..., call..., commissioning..., salvation... are ALWAYS bigger than just an individual promise.... They are for the good of the world..... And that big promise is also for YOU.... It’s a promise made for the spectacular scope of all of creation.... God makes promises to you.... and keeps promises through you.... for the good of the world.

“Go... I will show..., make..., bless..., curse..., and give... so that all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

“So Abram went...” God promised, Abram went..... He stopped at Shechem, where God appeared to him, so he built an altar and worshiped.....

And that altar was there when Abe’s grandson Jacob camped out on that hill, still a little afraid of his brother Esau.

It was the land that Jacob, on his deathbed, gave to Joseph.

It was the place that Moses told Joshua to gather the Israelites after they crossed the Jordan River into the promised land. And so they did.

It was the place where Reheboam was crowned king after his father Solomon died.

It was the place where the Roman king renamed the altar after Zeus.

And it was the place where Jesus talked to a Samaritan woman, despised by the Jews, but still part of the world that God so loved; and today we stand with Abraham.... on that hill.... living in the promise that extends even to us.

God’s original promise has not changed in.... substance....., outcome....., or purpose..... You are ones who bear the great name of God in the land where you live..... And you are ones whom God calls to “Go!”..... Not always from your homeland or your kindred..., but to “Go, make disciples of all nations....”

That’s why we claim the words that describe the vision here: People gathered and sent in the love of Christ.

God shows us this place.... and forms a new community.... every time people are gathered....., and God sends us from this place... in his love.... to be a blessing to and for the world.

[We share God’s promises....., and we keep promises that we make....., and we stand up in protest when promises to the world are broken.... and we forgive others when they break theirs promises to us....., as we in our turn are forgiven when we break ours.....///]

(Quote: William Sloane Coffin, 2004 – posted on FB by Dawn Rundman)

What's the point of being Christian if you don't also know that what God withholds in the way of protection, God more than supplies in the form of support.

For the world breaks God's heart, too.

No pain our spirits endure,  
no weakness that impairs our bodies,  
no grief that bows us low  
fails to find its counterpart in God who, as we see in Christ, suffers with and for us.

"God that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."

Sometimes I think it's God's pain,  
not God's peace,  
that passes all understanding.

So come home to church,  
not for protection against all the travails of this earth, but rather for all the support that heaven  
alone can provide.

Finally, come to leave.

For we come to God's house,  
to this open house,  
to find love and to defeat hate,  
in order that the world itself can become an open house.

From "Credo," by William Sloane Coffin, 2004