

Promises - Promises

The God who meets us in the Old Testament is a promising God. God makes promises and proves faithful to those promises. The God who calls the world into being now makes a second call – a promise – to an aged man and his barren wife. The purpose, as we will see, is to fashion an alternative community in a creation that seems to have gone awry.

I will continue these written sermonettes each week but know on Sunday there is a more robust message (I'm sorry, I can only write so much). We have begun the process of recording a service – I can still use some help with that. Look at our website (HosannaPlattsmouth.org) or our Facebook page – Hosanna Lutheran Plattsmouth for videos of the sermon. We are still sitting 6ft apart in worship services at 8:30 and 10am. We are still asking that people to come and go wearing masks. Please leave a message at church (402-296-2662) if you have any questions.

Here is our PRAYER OF THE DAY

God of the covenant, As you promised Abraham descendants as numerous as the stars; you have also promised us that we might live under those stars as your people, faithful and loved. Show us how to live as your people, and how to nurture all your children with whom we share the same canopy of sky night after night. Amen.

Sermon: God's Promise to Abraham....

From a very promising beginning sin changed everything – but God had a plan and it began in a very unlikely way. God made a promise to a man named Abram who was 75 years old and he and his wife Sarai had no children. God told Abram to leave his father's household and go to a land that the Lord would show him. The promise was this, ² *"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."* (Genesis 12:2-3) Wow, what a promise. Five "I's" – this is God doing it all..Let's dig in a bit. 'I will make you a great nation' – God speak for land and lots of descendants – a new community that would be called Israel. God imparts a blessing not just for the two but for all the peoples on earth. So we find Abram and Sarai, in contrast to the resistant and mistrustful world presented in the previous chapters of Genesis, are responsive and receptive to God's call.

This story begins a journey filled with promise and faith. Promise is God's mode of presence in the story. The promise is God's resolve to form a new community created through God's power and reliant only on God's faithfulness. Notice, only on God's faithfulness. But faith as a response is the capacity to embrace what God is doing.

I hope you can begin to sense God is doing an amazing thing – giving land to a landless man, children to the barren = hope to the hopeless. For with sin at work as Job figured out – we need God to act on our behalf – so this story is about bringing hope to a hopeless humanity.

This journey starts well – they set out but like what happened with Job they began to try to secure their own survival because at this point they do not trust exclusively on God’s promise. We see Abram’s weak faith in 12:10-20 which doubts the promise and so brings trouble. And then in 13:1-18 we see him believing and being at peace. God intervenes each time – we are left with the understanding that we (the community of faith) have things to do but that it is very obvious that God watches over his promise. After these adventures we are at our text for today.

Genesis 15:1-6 (NIV)

15 After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision:

“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”

² But Abram said, “Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” ³ And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”

⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.” ⁵ He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Abram and Sarai were called out of their barrenness by God’s promise – their journey of hope was on no other basis than the promise of God. The promise of God about their barrenness!! Yet by chapter 15 – they are still childless. The promise has not yet come. We are at times going to continue to live in our barrenness, experiencing doubt as we have seen with Abram above. Let’s see what happened.

God speaks to Abram in a dream – God tells Abram not to be afraid, God is with him and his reward will be great!!! Wow God’s amazing promise. Amazingly we next hear Abram’s doubt – his continued barrenness speaks louder than his faith at this moment. He has seen God do amazing things on the journey so far but at this moment his anguish is evident. Without an heir there is no sense of future for Abram. Without a future there is no hope. Can you see that in the world today – these are great lessons to be learned – Job felt the same way sitting on that ash heap he could see no future. Why and how does one continue to trust solely in the promise when the evidence against the promise is all around? Let’s see what God says.

God makes his promise again – ‘a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir’ His word spoken and then a sign; a picture as it were ‘look up at the sky and count the stars...so shall your offspring be’. Wow - **what power that sign indicates about God** –

We too struggle, as did Abram, with the emergence of a certitude that is based not on human reasoning but on a primal awareness that God is God. Only a new awareness that God is really

God can provide for Abram's future. See the stars – the God who created the stars is the same God who can make a son for this barren family. Abram 'believed' – that changed everything.

Abram has repented – he has abandoned a reading of reality which is measured by what he can see and touch and manage. He's not just thinking that 'everything will work out all right'. He knows that God the creator can make that future happen for him.

This new faith is a miracle from God. Look at what Jesus said *"¹⁷Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven."* (Matt 16:17) Abram did not move from protest (vs2-3) to confession (vs6) by knowledge or persuasion but by the power of God who reveals and causes his revelation to be accepted. And so the text announces afresh what it means to be the human creatures we were created to be, that is to be righteous. Cool isn't it. Lord, help my unbelief!!! And God is there to help, for later on the Lord would again remind Abraham *"Is anything too hard for the Lord"* (Gen 18:14) and a year later a son was born to them. God doing what God says God will do!!!!

Let us Pray: Gracious Father – thank you that we can call you Father – that you called us your children and you draw us to yourself. Thank you for the gift of your Son and the Holy Spirit to teach and to guide. Help us learn what you want us to learn as we journey through the Bible. Help us hear and trust in your promises. Help our unbelief. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear and a heart willing to follow your will in our lives. Help us be the children you want us to be. Help us to love you and love others. We lift up the healthcare workers – keep them safe. We lift those who have the virus – heal them. We lift up the researchers – may you give them wisdom to find a cure and vaccine quickly. We lift up our leaders – grant them wisdom to deal with this for the good of all they serve. Help us be conscious of care for ourselves so that we can care safely for others around us. Help those who are at a higher risk to be safe but to reach out to our larger family so that we can serve them. We thank you Lord for all that you have done and are doing. Praise and blessing to you – in Jesus name we pray and all God's children said.... Amen.

BLESSING: Sending message from St. Teresa of Avila

"Christ has no body now, but ours. No hands, no feet on earth, but ours. Ours are the eyes through which Christ looks compassion into the world. Ours are the feet with which Christ walks to do good. Ours are the hands with which Christ blesses the world." † AMEN.

Verse of the Month

⁷Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. (1 Corinthians 1:7)

Song for this Sunday is "Flawless" by Mercy Me