

Meditation for 6.14.20

2nd Sunday after Pentecost

“Promises, Promises!”

Genesis 18:1-15; 21:1-7

Rev. Darwin G. Edwards

Gen. 18:1 The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. ²He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. ³He said, “My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. ⁴Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. ⁵Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.” So, they said, “Do as you have said.” ⁶And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, “Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.” ⁷Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. ⁸Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

Gen. 18:9 They said to him, “Where is your wife Sarah?” And he said, “There, in the tent.” ¹⁰Then one said, “I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. ¹¹Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. ¹²So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?” ¹³The LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ ¹⁴Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.” ¹⁵But Sarah denied, saying, “I did not laugh”; for she was afraid. He said, “Oh yes, you did laugh.”

Gen. 21:1 The LORD dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had promised. ²Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. ³Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. ⁴And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. ⁵Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ⁶Now Sarah said, “God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.” ⁷ And she said, “Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

Don't you just love it when someone keeps making promises and never follows through? I remember as a child, I was a culprit. I'd promise my parents that I would complete my list of chores, yet, I'd have to be reminded many times under threat of the “green switch,” plucked from the bush outside the back door. The local barber, who weekly took his son and my older brother fishing, continued to promise to take me when I was older. His promise was fulfilled several years later when his son and my brother became interested in girls. Then, there's the story of my “blood brother” promising always to be my best friend, until he was lured away by

the luxurious bribes of our other friends. Harsh lessons to learn that could encumber our character for the rest of our lives.

We earnestly take vows (make promises) at our baptism, reception into a denomination and local church: *"As a member of this congregation, will you faithfully participate in its ministries by your prayers, your presence, your gifts, your service and your witness?"* (Baptismal Covenant I, United Methodist Book of Worship p. 93). How many of these promises do we faithfully keep? We are diligent to some but seldom all of them. Think of your marriage vows (promises). How many of those do you continue to keep? *"...to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death..."* (Christian Marriage I, United Methodist Book of Worship p. 120). All of us are good at making promises, but how many of us keep them and when are they fulfilled? You remember the old idiom – *"The road to hell is paved with good intentions."*

Why do we have such a hard time keeping our promises and why can't we fulfill those promises in the present time and not keep dragging their fulfillment into the distant future? Is it because we are thinking only of ourselves and what's best for us? It happens at my house often. I promise my wife I will take the laundry baskets down into the basement the day before she plans to wash clothes. Then, the next day she discovers, as she stands before the washing machine, I haven't fulfilled my promise. She'll ask me to call "so and so" to take care of important business (that I really don't want to bother with) and then 30 days later, when we receive notice, I remember, I forgot. Why? Thank the Lord that we didn't inherit that from God! God keeps promises, though neither by our timeline nor by our suggestive solution.

Our Old Testament lesson today is characteristic of the nature of God. In the heat of the day, Abraham is relaxing at the entrance of his tent at the oaks of Mamre. It is one of those 110-degree days that sap the energy out of any man, especially one 99 years of age. He was enjoying the breeze under the terebinth tree – *'under the ole oak tree.'* Possibly his mind was wondering and suddenly before him stood three men. Traveling in the heat of the day, indicated that their mission must have been very important. No one traveled mid-day in such heat. As was characteristic, Abraham got up, ran to greet the men, bowed before them, offered them water to wash their feet and refresh themselves as he hosted them under the oaks of Mamre. He was able to determine that their mission was urgent and that they would not be able to stay, but only pause for a repast. The three agreed to do as Abraham offered and after they had received the water and a little bread, Abraham decided to provide a smorgasbord. He ran into the tent and told Sarah to take the best ingredients to prepare cakes for their guest. Then he ran to the herd to seek out the fatted calf, reserved only for special occasions or guests, and had it slaughtered and prepared. Once prepared, he took curds (a kind of yogurt), milk, the cakes and the prepared meat and set it before the three guests. While they ate, he stood before them as their servant.

Uncharacteristically, the three guests knew their host's wife's name though they never mention his. The purpose of their visit was to fulfill the LORD's covenantal promise of a son to Sarah. She was to be a part of the covenant. (Abram had received a son, Ishmael, through Hagar, yet counter to God's promise, wanted him to be his heir.) The guests asked if Sarah was present. Abraham acknowledged her presence within the tent. One guest began to prophesy that they

would return in due season and that Sarah would have a son. Abraham was ninety-nine and Sarah was ten years younger. How could that be possible? Sarah was listening from the tent and laughed cynically to herself. This was the fifth time she had heard that promise and time had made her very skeptical. Verse 13 is earthshattering, as we discover that Yahweh, the LORD, is one of the three. He ask Abraham why she laughed. Sarah was “called-out!” Her silent laugh was perceived by the LORD! Afraid, she denied it but the LORD corrected her. Verse 14 should be our life verse – *Is anything too wonderful for the LORD?*”

Twenty-five years after God made the promise of giving Abram land, becoming a great nation (many descendants) and being blessed to be a blessing, the LORD fulfilled his promise. Abraham was 100 years old when 90-year-old Sarah bore Isaac. God’s word is true. God is not like humans who renege on their promises. In due season God does provide in a Divine manner often unlike what we humans might expect.

What kind of promise is harder to believe than a promise that has been repeatedly not kept? What kind of promise-maker is harder to believe than one who has continually not kept a promise? We do it all the time. Through reading the Bible, we are apprised of God’s promises, but we sometimes believe they are untrue either because we did not recognize them when fulfilled or that God has chosen a different time to fulfill them. The same holds for our fellow human beings. We think we know the best way to solve a problem, but sometimes discover that others’ solutions bring success by other methods.

Many of us believe that there might have been a better way to endure COVID-19. Disbelief in the pandemic has proffered differing opinions on its cause, reality, cure along with claims that our freedom is being taken away. Similarly, current violence has questioned human response to promises made long ago. Many continue to ask why has God allowed this disease and chaos among his people. Have our problems been precipitated by this broken world of greed, pride, privilege and self-sufficiency? Promises of adequate health care continue to be offered by our governments through the hard work of the world’s medical professionals. Yet, sometimes it seems that profit is our only motive. Promises of justice and social equality seem only to be addressed when wrongful incidents ignite and fan the flames of dissension. Our reactions to both have become unruly.

On the sixth day of creation, God created all humans in the divine image and said it was VERY good. I wonder God’s reaction as we are observed in our discord? Can we not protect each other by following simple guidelines that safeguard the other? Can we not see that our fellow human beings are made in the image of God? Do we not remember the radical rabbi, Jesus, who turned the world upside down using the model of peace and not violence? God forgive us in our sin!

May we remember the promises of God and live in harmony with all of the Divine creatures and creation. Wesley’s three simple rules continue to be appropriate in the twenty-first century: *Do no harm. Do good. Stay in love with God.*

There is hope in humanity because we are made in God’s image and the Holy Spirit dwells within each of us. May God’s blessings continue to be showered upon us and may we respond with gratitude and thanksgiving. God’s promises are true. We can overcome all things through

faith in Christ by responding to the Spirit's will and not our own. It is possible! Our hope for living in peace and harmony is voiced in Genesis 18:14. *Is anything too wonderful for the LORD?* Amen? Amen!