

Sunday, 13 March 2022 – Second Sunday in Lent, Year C

Promises ~ God's covenant with Abram Genesis 15:1-12,17,18

A promise is something sent forward for us to have in the future.

Today we hear God's great promise to Abram – something Abram has to look forward to.

*"I promise to make you into a great nation.
And I will bless you.
I will make your name great.
You will be a blessing to others.
I will bless those who bless you.
I will put a curse on anyone who puts a curse on you.
All nations on earth
will be blessed because of you."*

Promises are serious.

Kids show us exactly how serious a promise is: **"Cross my heart and hope to die - Stick a needle in my eye,"**

You can't get out of a promise.

Crossing your fingers behind your back is what traitors do.

Some promises are just empty – and we know it

Who said these promises?

"I promise that no child will ever live in poverty" (Bob Hawk)

"I promise there will never, ever be a GST" (1995: John Howard)

"I promise there will be no Carbon Tax" (2011: Julia Gillard)

"I promised there will be absolutely no cuts to education and health at all" (2014 Tony Abbot)

Political promises are like babies: easy to make, hard to deliver.

Sadly, one of the most common broken promises is this: *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, till death do us part,*

Most of us have broken this promise at some time – not just those who have been through divorce.

Yes, what can you break, without even touching it?

A promise.

"Stick a needle in your eye" – child's play!

Listen to this – this is how you make a promise!

Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, and a dove, and a young pigeon.

Cut these animals in half and lay them out each half opposite the other half"

Abram did this – there were a lot of crows trying to eat the carcasses but Abraham chased them away.

That night a blazing, smoking fire-pot appeared and passed through the middle of the carcasses.

God is saying I will be cut in half and eaten by crows if I do not keep the promise I made to you today.

“Poke a needle in your eye”! – Nothing!

There're so many empty promises today – most promises annoy us because we know they're not true.

This product promises to make your clothes smell like fresh lemons.

This product promises to make you smell irresistible.

This car promises to make you tough, popular, sexy, and classy.

Who can trust a promises.

We can trust God's promises.

Because God's has fulfilled every one of his promises already he makes his word the truth.

We apply the Dr Phil philosophy to God's promises: *“Past behaviour is the best indicator future behaviour”*.

We know every one of God's promises of the past have come to fulfillment – which guarantees any promise He makes.

Like Slim Dusty's song “looking forward looking back” – to see your way forward you look back at the certain things in life.

It's the promise-maker that makes the promise – it doesn't depend on the receiver.

In C S Lewis' biography he tells of a promise he made during WW1 to his dying mate. He promised that he would look after his mate's wife and daughter for the rest of his life.

Sound almost Hollywood doesn't it?

Here is the twist – they fell in love and got married. No Joking!

His mate's wife turns out to be absolutely awful – she was rude, obnoxious, ungrateful, arrogant, and domineering.

But Lewis never used her arrogance as an excuse to break his promise. And there is the heart of a promise: **It's the promise-maker that makes the promise – it doesn't depend on the receiver.**

To fulfil God's promise to Abraham that we will become a holy nation – God also promised a Saviour.

Without a saviour we would be nothing – certainly not Holy.

The angel promised Joseph that a child will be born and this child will be called Jesus he will *“save his people from their sins”* (Matt 1:21).

God promises what we need – from love and compassion to harsh discipline.

If our greatest need was for information, God would have promised GOOGLE way back in the garden.

If our greatest need was technology, God would have sent Sir Mark Oliphant long ago.

If our greatest need was the arts, God would have sent us Adelle ages ago.
If our greatest need was money, God would have sent Twiggy Forest long ago.
If our greatest need was pleasure and reliability, God would have sent Harley's well before 1903.

Our greatest need is for forgiveness...to be made right with God.
From the beginning of time God promised us a Saviour called Jesus "he saves".

We are looking down the barrel of Easter.

- When Jesus died on Good Friday, God made a promise that Jesus' life will pay for all our sins.
- When Jesus rose again from the dead he promised us victory over death - eternal life.
- He promised that the Holy Spirit will be our helper and strength through the ups and downs of life –
- He promised us *Immanuel* which means "God will be with us".
- In our baptism he promised that he would always be our heavenly Father, and we will always be his children.

When God makes a promise, it's a done deal.

C S Lewis kept his promise to the rude, obnoxious, ungrateful, arrogant, and domineering woman.

The integrity of promise is in the promise maker, isn't it?

A promise is something not here yet, but has the power to completely change the way we deal with the "now."

As Luther said, **"if I knew I was going to die tomorrow I would plant an apple tree today"**.

He does something today – because of the promises of tomorrow.

We can live with certainty under the shadow of God's promises – like we are going to the promised land – we are promised heaven.

Let God's future promises govern how we live today.

He promises on the last day we will be presented radiant, without blemish, no sin or shame, (Jude)

So why hold onto rubbish, hate and spite, today – it's kind of pointless.

He promises that we are his face and hands in this world – "Ambassadors".

Do people see God's face in your you – in your eyes, in what you do?

Today I am just reminding us of what a promise is and the hope we live under the shadow of God's promises.

Once there was a weird SBS documentary about rats. They did all sorts of experiments on wild rats. They were typically SBS distasteful but fascinating.

They got 2 big buckets of water and ½ filled them with water. Then they put one rat in each bucket of water. Of-course the rats swam around and around looking for a way out.

After about 5 minutes they put a ruler into one of the buckets – that rat went straight to the ruler and hung on to it and had a rest. The other one kept swimming around and around.

After 5 minutes they took the ruler out of the bucket and that rat had to start swimming again.

No here's the deal. In SBS style they filmed all this; The rat that didn't have the ruler eventually drowned – it took about 2 hours.

The rat that experienced the ruler swam around and around but he would stop where the ruler was each lap. He would stop where the ruler was and look for it.

Too me he had experienced hope.

You know what, that rat did not die - the experiment went for 24 hours, and he did not die.

He had the hope of the ruler.

I assure you we have for more hope than some weird scientist with a ruler.

We can trust in God's promises anywhere anytime.

We can swim around and around in this world – knowing there is hope – the hope of forgiveness – the hope of eternal life.

Knowing this we can swim for ever.

You know what happens to people with no hope – no promise in their life – it's tragic.

Where there is hope there is life, and good forever more.

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- No child will ever live in poverty.
 - We will never ever have a GST.

We've heard these empty promises – we spot them a mile off.

But we're dealing with whole different level.

He was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are
healed.

This is a different calibre of promise – it's the promise shadow we live under with hope and joy. The integrity of this promise is in the promise maker.

The joy and newness of life is in the receiver.

Just as the condition for a miracle is impossibility – so to the condition for God's promises is impossibility – a mighty nation from a frail old “dried up” couple – impossible!

Abram laughed. Sarah Laughed. Sarah even tried to imagine it – “how can he pleasure me at my age” and then laughed some more.

Him save you while you are yet a sinner – an impossible promise – as the robber entered paradise..

Amen.

Lord help us to receive your every promise in faith – and count as among the righteous. Help us to see your promise played out this Easter. Amen.