

Second Sunday in Lent - based on Genesis 12:1-4 and Romans 4

Promises

As a kid you love it when people make promises to you.

“I promise to take you to the test match next year”.

“I promise you every Sunday afternoon we’ll go fishing”

As you grow up you get to know people don’t always keep their promises.

You get to know sometimes people just can’t keep that promise. They are too busy.

And you get to know that sometimes people make promises they never intend to keep.

And you learn that the whole world is built on promises. We expect to get paid for the work we do because that’s what the boss has promised. Sometimes they won’t or can’t. We look to our politicians to do what’s best and just for our community because that’s what they’ve promised. Sometimes they won’t or can’t.

And what about us? None of us keeps all our promises in full all the time. So when we hear about God making a promise, we are right to ask: “will he keep it?”

The Old Testament reading and the new Testament Epistle for today home in on perhaps the greatest promise God ever made.

In the reading from Genesis chapter 12 we are introduced to Abram. He lived about 1800 BC. He was a nomad and with his family wandered around in the area we know as Iran.

His name means father. But that seemed like a sad joke on him. Because he and his wife Sarah had no children and were too old to expect any.

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AND, because they were nomads they had no land to call their own.

AND as far as we know they knew hardly anything about the only true God.

All that makes what happens to Abram even more surprising.

Read Genesis 12 verses 1-4

It's a stunning promise. To this elderly, homeless, childless nomad God promises four things.

A land.

Generations of children who would be a great nation.

A great name.

And that Abram would be a blessing through which God would bring blessing to all the peoples on earth.

That is a huge, huge promise.

And notice a very important point.

You and I are mentioned!

We are part of "all the peoples on earth" that God promises he will bless! We, sitting here today on the other side of the world and about 60 lifetimes after Abram are there in this promise. Now that's pretty important, pretty significant. This is God's big plan for everything he has made.

So, there are two questions to ask:

1. What does this promise mean?

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AND:

2. Can God keep it?

1. What does this promise mean?

One answer to that question is – you have to look at the rest of the Bible.

Notice Abram never asks for the promise – God just makes it to him. He doesn't have to try to be good enough – he can't anyway. He doesn't have to prove himself worthy – he isn't anywhere near that. No – making this promise when Abram has done nothing to deserve it reminds us that God is ALWAYS gracious, not giving us what we deserve, but giving us what we don't deserve. It's a "grace promise". It's a salvation promise – a promise of rescue.

Abram will be rescued from being homeless – God will give him a land. God will rescue Abram from childlessness – he will give him descendants "in number more than the grains of sand on the seashore" as it says later.

He will be rescued from being unknown – he will be given a name – Abraham – known as Great Father by (as we know) over 2/3 of the world's population -Jews, Muslims and Christians.

And he will be rescued from a life of meaninglessness – through him God will bless all the peoples of the world.

But still, **what does it mean?** And we get part of the answer to that by turning to the second question:

2. Can God keep his promise?

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And the answer is yes he can! And he has!

It was a long time with many a slip along the way for Abram and his descendants. Abram and all his descendants - except one - failed to live for the God who had made such a magnificent promise.

From Abram on they were to live differently, showing they belonged to God. But they didn't. They failed. Miserably. Simply because they didn't trust the God who promised them everything.

Starting with Abram himself, then his son Isaac, then his grandson Jacob, and moving right through the history of the people of Israel, it was one story after another of failure to trust themselves to God. But God never gave up on his promise. Because one day there came into this world a direct descendant of Abram who did perfectly trust God.

And through what this descendant did by his death for our not trusting God, and his rising from the dead to show God accepted his sacrifice, God kept his promise. Obviously this descendent is Jesus.

This Jesus brings entry, not to an earthly country that can be seized by others or destroyed by disease and decay, but to a whole new and eternal heaven and earth where everything is right.

This Jesus, who does not have physical children, has children/brothers and sisters born of God.

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This Jesus brings the promised blessing to any who turn to him - not just to Abraham's physical descendants, but to people from every tribe and nation and tongue.

As Romans chapter 4 says: "so then, Abraham is the father of all who believe".

We are here today declaring to the world we follow Jesus. How has that happened? One answer – perhaps the most important one is: We are here today because God kept his promise – that astounding promise – made almost 4000 years ago to an unknown wanderer somewhere near Iran.

We are here today because God kept his promise to that man - in Jesus. As the apostle Paul says:
"For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ." (2 Corinthians 1:20)

Despite the way things look and the way the world is going; Despite how we ourselves may feel or what we may experience; God has a plan promised to Abraham and kept in Jesus. It has not been kept in full yet. But we know it will be. Jesus is the 100% guarantee.