



*Promises, Promises*

Second in a sermon series on Genesis

*Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7*

Second Sunday after Pentecost, June 18, 2017, Father's Day

First Federated Church, Peoria, Illinois

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It was a sunny day like to today. The cool morning breeze jumped and dove between the white chairs. The aisle running down the middle wasn't too long, but it was long enough for the groom to gaze upon his bride as she walked to the front, even though her face was covered by a veil. Jacob had been waiting for that day for the better part of a decade. It was more than seven years ago that Laban, his soon to be father-in-law, promised him he could marry his daughter, Rachel. Jacob was overjoyed by Laban's promise because he was in love with Rachel and had been since the first time she said "hello." After seven years of hard labor; shepherding and farming, Jacob had fulfilled his obligation. Now, it was time to marry his love as promised, or so he thought.

After the ceremony was complete, Jacob lifted the veil from his bride's face, smiling to himself with a deep sense of joy and excitement. His excitement however, quickly turned to confusion. It wasn't Rachel who stood before him in the gown. It was Leah, Rachel's older sister. Shocked he asked for an explanation. Laban told Jacob it wasn't their custom to have the younger sister marry first. The eldest daughter always marries first. By choosing to conform to the cultural customs, Laban broke the promise he had made to Jacob. A promise which had been made seven years earlier and ultimately ended up costing Jacob 14 years of his life. Laban had broken his promise.

People make promises and people break their promises. We all face broken promises. Politicians promise equality, but we live in a world where judicial systems profile and jail based on the color of people's skin. Employers promise to remain in the community, but we live in a world where they move their headquarters upstate only a few months later. Healthcare providers promise affordable coverage, but we live in a world where medical bills bankrupt families. Automakers promise efficiency, but we live in a world where gas mileage is inflated. Technology companies promise happiness with the latest gadget, but we live in a world where the improved version will be

released in a couple of weeks. Parents promise to pay attention, but we live in a world where phones take priority. Spouses promise to fulfill their wedding vows, but we live a world where sickness and addiction ruin relationships. You don't have to think long or hard about a promise made to us and then was broken. We live in a world where people continually make promises and continually break their promises. Some broken promises don't have massive repercussions. Like when we say we will fold the towels lengthwise instead of widthwise. Other broken promises are life changing. Like Laban putting Leah under the veil instead of Rachel. Regardless of the type of promise, we expect the promise maker to keep their promise. It is their obligation. It is their word.

Yet, we aren't just the recipients of broken promises like Jacob. We are also promise breakers like Laban, because we live in a world infected by sin. Sin affects all things, all that has been created, including us. So we too break promises. Promises to be on time. Promises to be in the bulletin by Thursday. Promises to call our sister back. Promises to help out with the housework. Promises to say something when someone is being gossiped about. Promises to be faithful even in the face of temptation. Promises to be there despite our business. Promises to be kind even when upset. Promises to love even when we don't feel like it. Promises to carry out our vows in the face of adversity. We promise to do this one thing, if God would get us through this situation. The list goes on and on and I'm sure you can name dozens of others. We all make promises and we all break promises.

Genesis 18 tells a truth about God that is in contrast to our brokenness, our promise breaking. God never breaks the promises God makes. A few chapters early in Genesis God promised to Sarah and Abraham that they would have a child of their own, but that was some time ago and they still didn't have a biological child together. Now, no one knows exactly how much time had passed between God's promise to them and where we pick up in the Bible this morning, but I think it is fair to say Sarah and Abraham probably had their concerns about God's promise. In Genesis 18 Sarah was about ninety years old and Abraham was one hundred, both well past the childbearing and rearing age. So when the three visitors showed up to their tent by the tree of Mamre and reaffirmed God's promise to give them a child of their own Sarah responded as I think we all would, she laughed. To have a child at ninety and one hundred years old is absurd and biologically impossible, for humans anyway. Although, one year later Sarah and Abraham had a child just as God promised them. They had a boy and they

named him Isaac, which interestingly means “He laughs.” God made a promise and God kept that promise. That is a truth of our text this morning. The God who Sarah and Abraham followed, the same God we follow, keeps all his promises. God did long ago and he does now. God is a promise keeper.

In fact, God’s promises are immutable. That is to say, what God promises will never change or be broken. God is not inclined to sin as we are. Therefore, God does not break the promises he makes. All that God has promised is fulfilled.

We are witness to this truth throughout scripture. In the Old Testament God led the Israelites through the desert and into the promised land just as God said. God also gave the Israelites food to eat and water to drink while they traveled from place to place, caring for them just as God told them he would. God told the Israelites he would give them a king and God gave them kings, just as he promised. In the New Testament we see God uphold the promises made by fulfill all the Old Testament prophecy about the coming Messiah. God also promised us that we will not be left alone. After Jesus ascended to heaven we have been given the Holy Spirit who leads us in ways of righteousness and unites us to God. We are not alone the Holy Spirit is with us just as God said. It is clear throughout the Bible that God keeps his promises.

In our lives, we too see God’s promises upheld. Sometimes the promises of God are fulfilled behind the scenes by the whisper of the Holy Spirit in our hearts as we pray for our daughter, our son, our spouse, our employment, our home, and the many other things which trouble our souls and distract us. Other times God keeps his promises to watch over us and protect us in big ways: bills are paid by a generous and anonymous donor, emergency medical technicians tend to us after a crushing auto accident and we live, and houses are sold only two days after they go up on the market. Ultimately, when we partake of communion we do so with the same God “who has promised to be with us always, even to the end of the world. In the breaking of the bread God makes himself known to us as the true and heavenly Bread that strengthens us unto life eternal.” In the cup of blessing we are joined with the vine that sustains and nourishes us. God has promised never to leave you or forsake you. We see those promises fulfilled every time we partake of the Lord’s Supper.

God’s promises to us are always kept, but they don’t always happen the instant we want them to. Jacob had to wait and toil for his bride. Sarah and Abraham had to wait for years

for the birth of their son, Isaac. We don't know how many years, but it seemed like forever and a day, that phrase is in the modern translation. We too get to wait, but in God we are not waiting on broken promises like the one made by Laban. In God, we rest secure that God's promises will come to be, just as they did for Sarah and Abraham. At the Lord's table we see God's promises fulfilled. Our Father gave his Son to keep the promise that in Christ you have life. God is the perfect promise keeper.