

Third Sunday after Pentecost - A Proper 6 (2026)

Genesis 18:1-15

Psalm 116:1, 10-17

Romans 5:1-8

Matthew 9:35-10:15

‘The LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ Is anything too wonderful for the LORD?”.....The LORD dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah *as he had promised.*’ In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

A lot has transpired in the journey of Abram and Sarai since the LORD called upon them to pack up everything they owned and set out for an unknown destination. In my mind’s eye, I can envision this trek, albeit undertaken willingly and grounded in trust that the LORD would do as he said, but nonetheless filled with wonderment what all these Divine declarations concerning the ‘making of him a great nation,’ that he ‘would be blessed and be a blessing to others,’ and ‘through him all the families of the earth shall be blessed’ actually meant and how these promises might come to fruition.

The history of their journey as recorded in Genesis finds them going to Egypt due to a famine in the land of Canaan, the trip during which Abram first uses the lie that Sarai is his sister, not his wife, out of fear that the Egyptians will take her from him because of her amazing beauty. As part of the journey, Abram and Lot go their separate ways due to the size of their respective flocks, families, and slaves, given the famine and the land's inability to support such a large group of people and animals. A regional and tribal war breaks out, during which Lot is captured, and Abram calls upon several of his allies to rescue his nephew, an undertaking that proves successful. The LORD appears once again on the scene to reaffirm his prior promise of an heir and land, and that Abram would die in peace and be ‘buried in a good old age.’

Considering the tribulations of the journey so far and despite the LORD’s provision and reappearance, Sarai is having a hard time ‘keeping the faith.’ She

arranges, with Abram's consent, to have Abram father a child with her mistress. Ishmael was born when Abram was 86 years old. Thirteen years later, Abram, now 99 years of age, the LORD again appeared to Abram, this time to not only affirm his plan for Abram's heir, but to covenant with him that the newly named Abraham would indeed have land and people as he had previously promised. We might remember this Abrahamic Covenant with a little wry smile, as it was sealed by all the males being circumcised and a commitment that all newborn males would also be circumcised eight days following their birth.

Sarai got a new name, now called Sarah. The LORD provided a little more information about his promise of a child for them, promising them once again that they would have a son named Isaac, and that the everlasting covenant would continue through Isaac's lineage. There is much more to come, especially that fiery episode at Sodom and Gomorrah. But today we have the encounter with the LORD and his two traveling angelic companions with Abraham and the chuckle of Sarah from the back of the tent at the thought of her having a child in her old age. While not a part of today's reading, this section concludes with the promise of the LORD coming true as she bears a son, Isaac, whose name means 'One who laughs or rejoices.' Promises made; promises kept; promises still to play out.

The theme of faith, trust, and obedience from last week continues this week. As the years pass and Sarah and Abraham exhibit their impatience and times of not being truthful, the LORD nonetheless kept his promise of a child, a son of laughter and rejoicing, being born to them. Twenty-five years of traveling one dusty mile after another, enduring intense ordeals, and endless waiting come to a joyful end with the fulfillment of a promise.

So, what about us? For what promises are you waiting to come to fruition? How important is it for you that they come true, let alone come true in your lifetime? Have you ever felt let down by God, that whatever you were expecting, either hasn't come together or didn't manifest itself in a way you imagined or hoped?

I mulled these questions repeatedly this week and came to a few conclusions. First, from a human perspective, I have been incredibly blessed that the people I have trusted in my life have virtually always ‘come through’ as they said they would. I guess that’s why I trust them, right? To the extent a promise couldn’t be kept, it was for reasonable and understandable reasons. Why would any of us hang around people who aren’t trustworthy, who consistently fail to live up to their promises made to us?

Likewise, I’d like to think that I have consistently lived up to promises and commitments I have made to others. The more we fulfill our commitments to others, and they to us, the more their willingness and ability to do so in the future becomes second nature. This is how societies function: on faith and trust in others to do as they say they will. Without it, how can we make decisions and live with a sense of peace and stability? When faith and trust are abused, divisions appear, and the need to protect ourselves through isolation and tribalization steps in where the community once stood. Need I say anything about our collective lack of faith and trust in the current political, educational, and informational systems so necessary for a properly functioning society? I think not.

As I said, I have been blessed, not lucky, to not have been burned or let down by others who failed to keep their promises. But I have certainly known many who have not had such good fortune. The heartbreaking stories of infidelity, of shady business practices by fellow business associates, of family and friends who promised to ‘have your back’ suddenly turn and run when the going gets tough. Or of trusted spiritual leaders who abused their position through emotional and sexual abuse. Or secular leaders who took bribes to sway outcomes not in favor of the common good. The examples are too numerous to name.

Secondly, it is into our current reality, whether sustained by those around us who stood tall and fulfilled their commitments, or left us in a state of continual skepticism, that the God who is unchangeable, reliable, trustworthy, and just, offers his promises of hope, joy, stability, love, and strength. The God of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Hagar, and Ishmael, makes and keeps his promises; promises, some of which are conditional, but mostly offered for our benefit if we would just accept them and follow in God’s ways of living.

The promises of God are not time-bound as we understand time; they last an eternity. The promises of God are rock-solid commitments made by the God who made the heavens and the earth. The promises of God include the reminder in the form of a rainbow of his everlasting covenant with all living creatures of every kind on the earth after the great flood. Or how he would deliver the Israelites from bondage out of Egypt, or that his love will never fail, or that through obedience, his people will be blessed and prosper.

God promises to be always with us, and he made that promise incarnational with the birth of Jesus. Jesus continued that promise when he commissioned the twelve to make disciples of all nations, reminding them that he would be with them, and us, unto the end of the age. God promises the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead, and a life to come to all who believe in his name. God promises power and discernment through the presence of the Holy Spirit. God promises to hear our prayers, even when we cannot utter a word. God promises that if we seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, he will take care of all our needs; sometimes maybe even our ‘wants.’

People are, at best, inconsistent in keeping promises. God is not!! People will often promise something in return for something else. God’s promises are based on truth, holiness, and justice. God will not be swayed to change his promises. The promises of God undergird the foundation of our faith, for if he were changeable and his promises uncertain, how could we trust him to follow through on what he said?

Heraclitus Riddens, a 17th-century poet and satirist, is credited with the following statement made in 1681: *“He makes no more of breaking Acts of Parliaments, than if they were like Promises and Pie-crust, made to be broken.”* In other words, promises should not be trusted. Promises made by the world should be scrutinized. Promises of God are beyond any scrutiny; they are commitments from God Almighty himself. God will not fail to keep his commitments. God cannot fail to keep his commitments. It’s up to us to take him at his word. And if we will, hope, love, faith, trust, joy, and peace will follow in abundance. And that’s a promise!!

