

“Word”

Sermon preached by Carmen Garrigan
Associate Pastor for Youth
Kirkmont Presbyterian Church
Beavercreek, OH
April 8, 2007
Text: 1 Corinthians 15:1-8
#8 in a Series of 10

Prayer: Heavenly Father, We thank you for this time together to celebrate the Good News that the tomb is empty and Jesus is Risen! We thank You for Your faithfulness and power. As we hear Your Word this morning we pray that You would write this Good News onto our hearts. Through the Holy Spirit we ask that You would dispel the darkness and doubts in our lives. Replace the darkness and doubts with joy and trust, for You are good and Your promise is sure. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Do you remember one of your first disappointments from your childhood or as a young person? One that stands out in my mind occurred when I was a summer long seminary intern at a church on the Nevada side of Lake Tahoe. I had already been living there for almost a month when the 4th of July was on its way. I loved my work there, but I was often lonely as I was far away from any familiar family and friends. When I learned that some relatives in my extended family would be traveling into the area to see me over the 4th of July I was overjoyed. I would have family to spend the holiday with! They did come to visit and we had a good time together. Yet, on the night of the 3rd they decided to hit the road again. The realization came to me: I would be spending the 4th of July by myself. It was too late to make new plans and everyone at the church thought I'd be with family, so no invitations were extended. I am not sure why, but that disappointment hit me hard. I had spent a 4th of July alone while in Europe a few years prior and had a great time maybe because I was in Europe and nobody else was celebrating it was no big deal. Perhaps it was the hope of one thing followed by the outcome of another. Even though I have forgiven that action in my heart, since then I have had a hard time taking those relatives at their word. They of course hadn't made any pinky promises to me about being there for the holiday. But that was my understanding, and I was disappointed that it didn't come into fruition.

I know that many of you have been disappointed in much greater ways. Many of you have to live through broken promises of much more devastating proportions. A spouses' broken wedding vows. Parents who walked in and out of your life at their convenience. Destroyed dreams that you were sure would come to pass. Anyone who has reached their first birthday has surely experienced disappointment and we've all likely been the source of someone else's disappointment from time to time. Maybe without even knowing it.

When human promises seem so easily made and easily broken, are there any sure promises we can rest our hope in? While I certainly pray that in the core relationships of your life there would be much more faithfulness than heartbreak, there is only one Promise Maker I know of Who still has a 100% fulfillment rate.

Today, Easter, is a day in which we celebrate this Promise Maker and rejoice in the fulfillment of His promise to us. Today I'd love to introduce you to this most faithful of Promise Makers or to deepen your understanding of a few of His promises. The place we can go to hear about the faithful Promise Maker and the promise He has made is His Word.

God's Word recounts to us the story of God's faithfulness in fulfilling His promise. At the end of this great story we hear this conclusion from Revelation 21: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true' " (21:3-5).

We are promised that for those who put their trust in God, that there will be no more death, crying or pain when we reach heaven. What an incredible promise! Ever since the fall when sin entered the world, humankind's greatest woes have been the result of our collective sin and the mourning that comes with death. If none of these realities besieged us, life would be as it was created to be experienced.

Today we have the opportunity to experience a foretaste of this promise yet to come through Christ's resurrection as He defeated sin and death by rising triumphantly. Later in 1 Corinthians 15 the apostle Paul says, "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power." "The last enemy to be destroyed is death." "...Then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:20-24, 26, 54-58).

As we continue our work in the Lord, or maybe even consider putting our trust in Him for the first time, I think it is helpful to see how God fulfilled His word in the resurrection of Christ, as a reminder of how God will be faithful to bring the remainder of His promise about. We can be assured that God's Word is faithful, and that He is most worthy of our trust. We could spend all day and then some studying how many passages of the Old Testament are fulfilled by the life, death and resurrection of Christ. But for today, as we remember God's faithfulness to His promise to raise Christ from the dead, as a firstfruit of what we will later experience, we will just be looking at three such examples.

God's promise came in a special way to a man named Abraham. God calls Abraham to Himself and to follow Him beginning in Genesis 12. The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

What a promise! In fact in this promise there are 7 distinct guarantees that the Lord gives to Abraham. Yet the road to seeing this promise even begin to be fulfilled is rocky. For starters,

Abraham and his wife Sarah are quite old and are beyond the normal age of conceiving a child. Instead of trusting God they take the situation into their own hands a number of times, the most disastrous of which is giving Sarah's maid to Abraham for the bearing of a child. Will they ever see God's promise of a child, who will be the beginning of a great nation, come to pass?

Finally, despite their waiting and doubts, God gives them a son. Yet after the son is nearly grown, the Lord makes a seemingly unusual request for Abraham to carry out. God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about" (Genesis 22:2). In the face of the seeming contradictions this command has with God's earlier promise, Abraham does as he is commanded. In doing so, he is proved obedient to God and is able to experience God's provision in yet another way.

And now that we are much further along in the development of God's story, we can now see how God used that event to prepare His people for another time in which He would provide: the giving of His own Son for our salvation. Listen from God's Word how He is faithful to keep His promise to Abraham: "Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, 'Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.' Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, 'Father?' 'Yes, my son?' Abraham replied. 'The fire and wood are here,' Isaac said, 'but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?' Abraham answered, 'God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.' And the two of them went on together. When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, 'Abraham! Abraham!' 'Here I am,' he replied. 'Do not lay a hand on the boy,' he said. 'Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.' Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, 'On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided' " (Genesis 22:3-14).

I hope you heard the language that points to God's provision for us. It was on the third day in which God's deliverance came and in which Isaac was given new life in his father's eyes. Abraham said that God would provide the lamb. Indeed He did, both in place of Isaac's death and in place of us having to bear the punishment of our own sin. God would give His only Son whom He loves so that we might live. God would provide the Lamb to be sacrificed. And God would bring about the deliverance leading to new life on the third day. By the custom and culture of his day, Abraham had considered his son dead to him for three days, until by the provision of the Lord he was restored to life. Today we celebrate the fulfillment of this. For us and for our salvation, Christ was the Lamb who was slain. He was raised on the third day so that we could experience new life in Him.

Later God called a prophet named Jonah to take a message to the people of Nineveh. Through the prophet's own disobedience he was subjected to the deep depths of despair in the belly of a great fish until God delivered him after three days and three nights. Scripture says that

this great fish was the provision of the Lord. Jonah experienced the immense despair that we may feel when God seems absent. This was what Christ experienced to the degree of no other when He bore the weight of our sins on the cross. Jonah 2, “From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. He said. ‘In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry. You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. I said, ‘I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.’ The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you brought my life up from the pit, O LORD my God. When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD. And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.” These may seem like strange events to us, but God’s plan and provision is perfect. Again, it was on the third day that Jonah was given new life out of the depths and God gave him a second chance to carry His word to the people of Nineveh.

Jesus himself points back to this event in history when asked for a sign by some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law. They said, “ ‘Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you.’ He answered, ‘A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here’ ” (Matt 12:38-42).

Jesus commends looking to the history of what God has done to understand how He will be at work in the future. Even though Jesus pointed this sign out to them, it is sad to think that even after he died and was raised again on the third day that they missed the significance of what Jesus had said to them.

There is one more example from Scripture I’d like to draw our attention to as we consider how faithful God is to His Word. It is amazing to me how the Father linked together all of salvation history when He appointed the times that the Son would die on the cross and be raised from the dead. Jesus was crucified on Passover as the sacrificial Lamb- the One God would provide Himself. And Jesus was raised from the dead on the day of the Feast of Firstfruits. The feast of Firstfruits is the third in a string of feast days celebrated annually in the Spring by the Jewish people. Most of us have an awareness of Passover and maybe even of the observance of the days of unleavened bread. But usually little is said about the Feast of Firstfruits, literally called “the beginning of the harvest” that is celebrated on the third day after the Passover. God commands the people of Israel to celebrate this special feast in Leviticus 23: “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, so that you may be accepted. On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it’ ” (23:9-11).

This special day marked the countdown to the annual barley harvest. The priest would wave a sheaf of green barley before the Lord as a symbolic gesture of dedicating the coming harvest to Him. It also demonstrated the people's trust in God- that He would bring about the harvest and provide for their needs. In 1 Corinthians 15:20 the Apostle Paul refers to Christ as the firstfruits of the resurrection. Jesus is the firstfruit and we will be a part of the coming harvest. This is yet another sign towards the fulfillment of God's promise of when those who put their hope and trust in Christ will share in the resurrection of their Lord (Romans 6:5) and when death, pain, and tears will be no more (Revelation 21:3-5).

For now we wait for the fulfillment of all that God has promised. And as we wait for that glorious day, we are reminded that our labor for the Lord is not in vain.

Yet the waiting and the working and the hoping for our glorious future in Christ is not an easy task. We still experience pains, suffering and death. Paul describes our current posture of waiting this way in Romans 8:18-25: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."

As we wait patiently we put our trust in the faithful promise of God and in His unfailing Word. Through Christ's resurrection we can know that our hope will ultimately not be disappointed. We may have trials and temptations, times of fear and doubt, but when we put our trust in Christ and the promise of His Word we can rest assured! His deliverance is certain and His salvation is real. Our Heavenly Father offers us the gift of His unfailing love (Psalm 100:5). Christ is the bridegroom Who is sure to return (Revelation 19:7-9; Matthew 25:10). The Holy Spirit is our constant Helper when all other help is far away (John 14:16-17). When declaring his trust in God's Word the Psalmist said this of God's promise: "Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and your servant loves them" (Psalm 119:140). "I rejoice in your promise like one who finds great spoil" (Psalm 119:162).

God's faithful love and enduring promise is our provision and our portion even if our fellow humans may disappoint us. On the Fourth of July 2002, my relatives may have disappointed me, but God did not. The promise of His unfailing love was as real and fresh as ever. I spent a beautiful afternoon and evening on my favorite beach along the shore of Lake Tahoe. He gave me the opportunity to meditate on His trustworthy Word and delight in the faithfulness of His promise. It was a special night that I still remember very well.

"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve." "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him" (1 Cor. 15:3-5, 20-22).

Would you repeat after me this glorious news:

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed!