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“God has made a promise” The Rev. Kara Leslie (02/25/2024, Second Sunday in Lent)

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Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable unto you, O Lord, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.

A medium-sized man with a traditional red Irish face, a little fluff here on his head, and an adventurous spirit and a lot of prayer. Went to Detroit to pick up some cars.

He had saved everything that he had, and had one investor that he had borrowed some money from, and so together they went into the car business. If you know anything about car business,

it's pretty risky. He put an ad in the newspaper and said, anyone that wants to come to Texas meet me on this day at this place. It's March 1941, and my grandfather stood at that place with keys to 40 cars,

not knowing who would show up, not knowing if they would be able to drive,

but he had asked if he wanted to come to Texas meet me at this place. And so 40 people showed up, and he handed them the keys to the car, he handed them, he showed them the car that they were going to drive, but he started off with a handshake and looking them in the eye, and he made a promise.

I will help you get to Texas, and you are going to help me get this car to Texas.

So all 40 cars made it all the way down to the small dusty town of Lubbock, Texas,

and my grandfather began his car business. 1941.

He was a different day and time. I can't imagine starting a business now like that,

but that shows you what a promise meant back then, and that it is different now.

You've ever made a promise and broke it, it hurts.

It hurts to break it, but it also hurts to receive the breaking of the promise.

But when we make a promise, we're also making and we're honoring that relationship
and what we have between that person and yourself.
Promises are hard to make, and they're easy, easy to break.
Maybe you've promised your children one time that you're going to make pancakes for dinner.
Not going to have any vegetables, but when it comes to dinner time, all of a sudden they're vegetables.
And there's not just vegetables, it's the ones that you do not like.
And I don't care how much syrup or butter you put on a vegetable, it's going to taste like a vegetable.
And your child looks up to you and says, Mama, we made a pinky promise.
And I promise that the next time you say, oh, we're going to have pancakes for dinner,
they're going to say, uh-huh, it better be pancakes this time.
But maybe you know when we grow up, our promises are a little bit different.
Our promises involve relationships, maybe marriage or parenting.
And something goes awry, something goes wrong in that relationship, and there is no communication.
You could be in the same room in your children receiving an award, and there is no talking, no glance, nothing.
You don't even stand close to each other.
Or maybe one of your parents have received an award.
But what they are now is very different than what they were most of their life.
And they broke that promise of parenting you with grace and love and strength.
It is hard to make a promise and it does seem easier to break them.
And now here we are 10 days into Lent with two Sundays, so total of 12 days.
And maybe you've already kind of fudged your Lent promises.
I had a friend one time when I was in college, and she said, you know, I'm giving up chocolate.
I eat it every day, I'm going to give it up for Lent.
And then on a Friday night, her family had come in town, and so they went to Atlanta, and they went to a fancy restaurant.
And I said, how was your dinner?
Oh, it was great. The white chocolate mousse was fabulous.
I said, oh, so you get what I mean.
I mean, we kind of fudge those around.
But see, our promises are exactly that. There are promises.
They're not God's promises.
We make promises to God. Oh, I'm going to do this. I'm going to be this.
I won't do this. I won't do that. And we fail.
And then God gives us the grace to lift us up, and we try again, and we fail.
And then again, God comes in because His grace is more than

sufficient.

And we rise again to go ahead.

God makes a promise to us in Jesus Christ.

And nothing, nothing, can separate us from that promise.

Our reading today in Genesis is a story about Abram and Sarri.

Now, a lot of us say that word differently, but that's the way I say it, Sarri.

And there were two older people that were told that they were going to have children.

Now, older might be 40, but these people are 99 years old and 90.

And God comes and says, well, it's time for y'all to have some children.

And we're going to just have lots and lots of kids and make sure your generations go on and on and on.

Now, I would think if I was Sarri, I would have laughed out loud at God in front of God and at my husband.

But God has made a promise to them that is different than any other promise that He's made to them before.

It's a promise that comes from deep within.

Not spring chicks, worn out and weary from all the adventures and changes and challenges of their life, but God says you will have descendants.

This is a promise that only God can make in their lives.

And even at their age, He calls something deep from within to come alive.

And our New Testament reading, Jesus also offers a promise.

Jesus says to the disciples, well, I'm going to suffer.

I'm going to die. It's going to be horrible. And then I'm going to rise.

But people weren't used to hearing the word rise because that's not anything that anybody had done before.

And so all they heard was the suffering and the death and the dying and the hardship.

And Peter's standing there and he says, come on over here, Jesus, come, let's talk.

Hey, we got a good thing going on here.

Everybody's talking about life and we're having a good time.

And why are you being such a downer talking about death?

Why do this?

And Jesus comes right back at Peter and says in the same strong voice.

Don't set your mind on human things, but set them on divine things.

Another way of saying this would be, come on and try to focus on God's promise.

God made a promise and I am here with you in these disciples.

Paul describes this promise as resting in grace.

It's faith resting in grace.

Now picture with me, what does it mean to rest in grace?

I think about a egg maybe in a nest or maybe when you're holding a baby and you're rocking that baby and looking and listening to them.

Or maybe when you raise your palms and replace the bread of life in

your hands, resting in grace.

What is this like and what is it not like?

I have a few thoughts on this.

It is not about the law.

The law said when you die you go in a hole and you're going to just be there forever.

But instead when you rest in the promise of the grace of Jesus Christ, it is how God enters your life and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

That is not about the law.

There is no law that can even begin to describe the love that Jesus Christ has for you.

Another thing that it is not about is you're doing.

You cannot make this promise happen.

It is God's doing.

As our scripture says, it is a reckoning.

Paul says the faith was reckoned to Abraham and right as righteousness.

And so it is to us too.

That we have been reckoned with in the grace and love of Christ.

Reckoned with is not a common word that we use very often.

But it means that God imputes God's righteousness into us, on us, around us and through us.

He declares us worthy and loved by this reckoning of God's righteousness into our hearts.

Hear me, regardless of your effort, your energy, or your excuses, God has made a promise to rest in you in Christ Jesus.

I thought this week of what does it mean to be reckoned by God?

You know, that is a big word and it has a lot of oath in it.

And I thought, well, it is going to be something huge and loud.

But truthfully, when we are reckoned with, it can be soft and gentle.

Remember, it is about God's promise and Jesus Christ that you rest in grace.

And I thought, you know, we could talk about ways in our world that things are reckoned to us.

I want us to spend this time and give a few ways that in our worship, we are reckoned with in the grace of Jesus Christ.

Because what you have here carries with you and goes out into the world.

In a few minutes, we will offer the peace of Christ.

Where else do you say peace be with you?

It is not something that I say in our meetings and maybe you don't either.

Peace be with you.

These are words of a promise.

When we say or sing, holy, holy, holy, Lord, God of hosts, how beautiful it is when we as a throng proclaim God's goodness.

And when that peace of bread is placed in your hand, and we say the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, that is a gift of promise that goes in you and gives you life.

Now, I don't know how the promise will come to you in your life, but I do know that you are already in that promise.

That you are resting in that grace in this moment, and in the years before, and in whatever happened this morning, that you are here resting in that grace.

And it comes in the places that you think it should, but also in those places that you think no one, not even God, would want to bring hope in grace.

The places that don't make sense, God's grace is there.

So when you leave this morning, and until our next time that we see each other, please know that you have been reckoned with.

You can't stop it, you can't destroy it, and you and nothing can take it away.

God made a promise and is kept it.

Is kept it that you will rest in the grace of Jesus Christ. Amen.