

The Law and the Promises

I speak to you in the name of He who Is, who Was, and who is Yet to come. PBS

How many of you have ever made a promise?

Ever broken a promise?

How many of you have ever experienced a promise made and broken?

In the Old Testament reading this morning, God is speaking to Jeremiah where He says "The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord.

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." (Jeremiah 31.31-33)

In other words, there was a promise made that was broken. The ancestors made a covenant or promise to God and then broke it. This promise will be different, says God, that the people will know the laws of God within their hearts...within their very selves. God is promising that they are God's people. The chosen.

How often do you question your faith?

DO you ever question your faith?

Do you feel the same about theology and those deep questions as you did when you were a child? A teen? In your 30's? In your 50's? In your 70's? The same as you did last year? 5 years ago? 10 years ago?

In the epistle to Timothy today, Paul is writing about having "itchy ears". I've heard of itchy palms before, but not itchy ears. What Paul is writing about is people stepping from complacency and beginning to question.

Trust me when I say that questioning is good. Doubt is good. However, there is a warning in Paul's writing today. He says "for the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths"
(2 Timothy 4.3-4)

It is **good** for us to question. It is **good** for us to go deep into issues that we may not have ever questioned before. It is **imperative** that we be discerning. Are we listening to only those who believe what we do? Are we challenging ourselves to stretch and perhaps even be uncomfortable in our faith as we work through stuff?

Now, brace yourself. I'm going to use a word that makes many of us uncomfortable.

Paul goes on to say "As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully." (2 Timothy 4.5)

How many of you consider yourselves an Evangelist?

What IS an Evangelist?

An evangelist is someone who spreads the gospel, meaning the life and works of Jesus Christ. The message of Jesus is what? It can be summarised in one word, what is that?

Love. It's love.

Now, it's very different to be an Evangelist and to be an Evangelical.
What's an Evangelical?

An evangelical is someone who believes primarily in personal salvation and in recruiting as many people as possible into believing what they do. Many of them are keepers of the law. Remember the Samaritan in last week's Gospel? Their salvation is connected primarily to salvation through works. You have to earn your way into the kingdom.

Would you say that we (Anglican and United) are evangelical? (Nope)

Would you say we are or should be Evangelists? (Absolutely)

Now let's move into the Gospel for today...

We hear Jesus tell the story of a persistent widow and an unjust judge. The widow has a case against a neighbour, we don't know the specifics, and she keeps "bothering" the judge to find in her favour. She is persistent. She believes herself to be right and she won't rest until she received justice. She is also very vulnerable. She is alone, nobody to advocate for her. She could very well give up, yet refuses to do so.

Jesus writes "for a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming'" (Luke 18.4-5).

Do you really think the Judge said out loud "though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone"? I'm not so sure about that. However, his admonishment "because she keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she does not wear me out by continually coming." It's not that this lady was coming to the court as we know it today. She was following him. Tapping him on the shoulder. She was present. She was persistent. And because he wanted her out of his life and to stop bothering him, he granted her request. We do not know what her request was. Only that it was against her neighbour.

The request is not important in this circumstance. What is important is that she believed that justice needed to be served and she went to the person that could give her justice. The judge. He is referred to as the "unjust judge" so she must have known this and

decided even though he was unjust, she was persistent in her cause.

She wants justice, and she keeps at him until she gets it. The Judge has all the power. Yet also a reputation that could be tarnished. And for a man with power, reputation is extremely important. For a poor widow, reputation is not even a factor. She has nothing to lose.

She had a wrong that needed to be righted and so she stood up and continually made herself visible to the judge. We are assured that those who cry to God to grant justice, that justice will be assured. Who are those? They are the chosen.

Who are the chosen?

Well, we are.

And what do we need to do to thank God for being God's chosen?

We cannot ever repay the gift we have been given in Jesus, but we can honour that gift by doing the work of an Evangelist.

Here's the hard part. How do we do that?

We live our lives by the Gospel. We help the needy, tend to the broken-hearted. We pray without ceasing that world we know God. We don't try to convert. We don't criticize or shame. We give to the world as Christ gave to the world. Through love.

Sounds simple, eh?

Your homework this week is to spend at least ten minutes a day, every day this week, thinking of the work of an Evangelist. Thinking of how to share God's message of love with the world. And after you've spent time in thought, move to prayer. Spend ten minutes praying for those that are in need of God's love. You can also include yourself in these prayers.

Living our faith as Christ would have us live it is the BEST way to live as an Evangelist. When Jesus faced the masses that were hungry he didn't conduct Bible Study, he fed them first. Then he encouraged them to love others.

The golden rule: Do unto others as you would have done unto you.

Simple, right?

Then let's go out and share God's love in this broken world.

Do you remember the collection we took at the Covenanting Service? I am delighted to tell you that we collected well over \$500. This money will go to the Fernie Women's Resource Centre. That's \$500 that will help women and children begin a new life. Well done, good and faithful servants.

Another way you can do that, if you haven't already done so, is to go out tomorrow and

vote. Yes, your vote matters. Vote with your conscience, vote with your heart. For the love of God, vote. Many people worked tirelessly to earn the vote for everyone. Women have only been allowed to vote in Canada since 1918. Chinese-Canadians since 1947. Japanese-Canadians since 1948. The Doukhobours since 1955. First Nations Peoples since 1960. Don't waste that ballot. GO AND VOTE! And if you already have cast your ballot, thank you.

Now let's get out there and change the world.
Love one another.
Love our neighbours.
Pray for those who love us, and pray for those who do not.

It's not easy, but it can happen. Will you join me?

Let's heal this broken world through love. How about it?

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19th after Pentecost
Jeremiah 31.27-34
Psalm 119.97-104
2 Timothy 3.14-4.5
Luke 18.1-8