

“God Fulfills His Promises in Jesus Christ”

Galatians 3:16

Sermon for the Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity 2022

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado

Rev. Dr. Charles Westby, Pastor

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In the epistle reading today, the Apostle Paul talks about God’s promises. He says, “Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ” (Galatians 3:16 ESV). This got me thinking about the promises God made in the Old Testament that are fulfilled in Christ. It is as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1: “For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, . . . was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory” (2 Corinthians 1:19-21 ESV).

God’s promises in Christ are important because they involve His plan of salvation. They are also important because they are like a light shining in the darkness that the darkness cannot overcome (John 1:5).

This is true of the first promise, the one made to Adam and Eve in the garden. Adam and Eve had just eaten from the tree God had told them not to eat of. They had succumbed to the wiles and temptations of the devil. They fell from faith and disobeyed God. They suddenly knew guilt and ran from God. They suddenly knew God’s judgment and the selfishness and pride of wanting to be one’s own god. They began to know sinful and corrupt thoughts and desires. They began to know death, and the weakness and suffering of the body. In the midst of this darkness, God promised an offspring of Eve who would crush the serpents head. This offspring would destroy the power of the devil and death, though in a surprising way; He would be wounded in the battle. This victory would involve His suffering (Genesis 3:15).

This is not the promise of many offsprings of Eve, as Paul says, but of one offspring.

Then there was the promise at the end of the flood. The flood came as God’s wrath against mankind because “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5 ESV). That is, whatever evil deeds humans did were for their own glory; and whatever deeds looked good and impressive on the outside, humans did for their own glory. So God brought the flood.

In the midst of this darkness, God provided Noah and the ark. Through them God saved a remnant of humanity so that the human story could go on. Noah’s name means rest. Rest from what? Rest from the wrath of God. Rest from the ceaseless striving and strife that comes from the pursuit of one’s own glory. Rest in God turning to us His blessing and favor, motivated by nothing more than God’s own desire to forgive and bless, because God is not only holy and just; God is also love (1 John 4:8).

As we know, God made a promise to Noah that He would never again destroy all living things by a flood. He attached that promise to the rainbow that appears in the sky when it rains. God said to Noah: “Behold I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you” (Genesis 9:9 ESV). Maybe the offspring here means all human beings after Noah. After all, the promise was made to all people. Yet, this promise would be empty without the one offspring who is the reason that the promise was made and the reason that the promise is real. The rainbow should remind us of Jesus, the offspring of Noah, who turns away God’s wrath and gives rest from the ceaseless striving and pain of sin (Matthew 11:28).

Noah was God’s provision of rest to preserve humanity in the flood. Jesus is God’s

provision of rest in relation to God, who restores human nature in new creation.

The Apostle Paul talks about the promises made to Abraham. “Go,” God said to Abraham, “to a land that I will show. I will make of you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. . . . And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 3:1-3). God clarified the last part of this promise more precisely when He said to Abraham: “[I]n your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 22:18 ESV). This is the promise to Abraham that the Apostle Paul refers to in Galatians 3:16).

God spoke the promise of this offspring at that time when God had told Abraham to go to a mountain in the land of Moriah and sacrifice Isaac there to God. Isaac was Abraham’s one and only beloved son. By the way, God gave this command only to Abraham, not to anyone else, ever.

At the right time, God stopped Abraham from going through with it. Abraham had Isaac bound on the stack of wood and his knife in his raised hand ready to follow through (Genesis 22:9-10). Then God stopped him and spoke this promise to Abraham: “[I]n your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 22:11-12, 18). This offspring is not of many but one, as the Apostle says. There could only be one offspring of Abraham, of Eve, of Noah, who could bring God’s blessing, in response to God’s judgment on account of sin.

It is the one and only beloved son of God, whom God presented and made the atoning sacrifice for us all. In this Son, this offspring of Abraham, God bestows blessing, by grace.

There are many more promises God made throughout the history of the human story and the story of His people Israel that we could talk about. But let us mention one more. This comes up because of the Old Testament reading today. The reading occurs in the middle of the story of civil war among the people of Israel. It says that “the men of Israel took captive 200,000 of their relatives” from the tribe of Judah, “women, sons, and daughters” (2 Chronicles 28:8 ESV).

This is horrific and heartbreaking. There was civil war among God’s people. The more powerful northern kingdom of Israel—more powerful as measured on human terms, not on any terms God glories in; the northern kingdom of Israel defeated Judah in battle and took 200,000 of God’s people captive to be slaves. In Israel’s rage against Judah, they dared exercise the power of possession over Judah, as if they could dispose of them in any way they pleased and use them for their own glory, to serve their own ends. This was darkness, indeed.

The promises of Christ come into this because of who the king of Judah was when all that happened. He was King Ahaz.

Now Ahaz was not a good guy. He worshiped the Baals and made metal images of them (2 Chronicles 28:2). He set up those images all over Jerusalem. He also set up a replica of the altar to some god that was at Damascus. He set up that replica at the temple in Jerusalem. He replaced the altar that Solomon had made pursuant to the LORD’s instructions, for the honor and glory of the LORD (2 Kings 16:10-17).

But Ahaz did even worse than that. He burned his sons as an offering to those false gods. He did this “according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD drove out [of the land] before the people of Israel” (2 Chronicles 28:3 ESV).

It was for these reasons that Judah was defeated by Israel. Not that Israel was any better. But Judah was the tribe of King David. God had promised that the promised offspring, the Christ, would come from the tribe of Judah and the ancestry of King David (Genesis 49:10; 2 Samuel 7:4-16). To do what Ahaz did betrayed not only the first commandment, but the promises of the Messiah.

Nevertheless, God sent the prophet Isaiah to meet King Ahaz. Isaiah spoke this promise to

Judah, to King Ahaz, and to all the people: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14 NKJV). “Immanuel” means “God with us.”

We live in the blessing of the fulfillment of this promise. Immanuel came one day, at the appointed time, offspring of a virgin’s womb. Offspring of Eve, conceived in Mary’s womb in a way that Eve could not have dreamed of; conceived by the Holy Spirit. And because He was so conceived He is the fulfillment of the promise of Immanuel, God with us. He is the fulfillment not only in name, but in reality.

In the midst of Ahaz’s abominable faithlessness, God made a promise of His unflinching faithfulness. In the midst of Ahaz’s idolatry, God made a promise of a Son, in human flesh appearing, in whom we would find true faith in God because God would be present for us in Him.

And so in Jesus God’s promise that He is with us is yes. In Jesus God’s forgiveness is yes. In Jesus, the promise of God’s grace, love, and mercy is true and real and never fails. In Jesus God does not pass by on the other side of the road, as we lay there half dead (Luke 10:31), being beaten up by our enemies of sin, death, and the devil, which are robbers, indeed. In Jesus God comes to us and pours the oil and wine of His redeeming grace on our wounds. And He does not put us on an animal, but on His own shoulders.

Jesus, Immanuel, the Son of Eve, comes to us and works upon us God’s mercy. And in this He works in us hearts that also love mercy; hearts that are open to our neighbor, to exercise mercy; the neighbor being the one whom God has placed before us, whoever that may be.

So we thank God for His promises today. And we thank God that they have been fulfilled in Christ, and will be fulfilled in Christ. As the promises of Old have been fulfilled, so too the promises of the new, of an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, not able to be polluted or corrupted, in resurrection and eternal life, will be fulfilled in Jesus (1 Peter 1:4). The promises will be fulfilled because God made promises throughout the human story and then brought them to fulfillment when Jesus came at Bethlehem, at the cross of Calvary, and at the empty tomb on the third day.

Until then, we live in the promise of Immanuel that we have in Jesus, where Jesus Himself said: “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). These promises shine into our darkness with a light of joy and hope that the darkness cannot overcome. Thanks be to God that His promises are “yes” for us in Jesus. Amen.