

John 1:43-51 – Epiphany 2B – “Fulfilled Promises of God” – January 13th/14th, 2018

Grace and peace to you all from God our Father and Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Throughout our lives we make promises. We make lots and lots of promises. We make a lot of promises but sadly, we don't always keep our promises. Broken promises hurt, ask any child who's been promised by their parents to go to the zoo or the park and, for one reason or another, it just doesn't happen. As a matter of fact, I had this happen to me this week. I told Jack I'd take him to Webster down the block to bring him skating. Unfortunately it was wet, rainy, and too warm to go skating on the ice – or the ice that was left I should say. Kids tend to bounce back from broken promises (maybe because they experience so many of them?), but as adults we tend to hang on to broken promises for quite a long time. And why is that? We hope that people are people of their word, that we can trust them, we can rely on them and they can rely on us. When that trust is broken, we don't look at them the same. A marriage on the verge of divorce because of unfaithfulness, because of infidelity, can indeed heal through God's power of love and forgiveness. But for many, many people, once that intimate promise to be faithful is broken, so also is the marriage. Parents can lose the trust of their children – or vice versa – if they are taken advantage of financially and don't pay back what they borrowed, what they promised to pay back. It's tragic how money has divided so many people: parents from children, brothers from sisters, cousins from cousins, friends from friends, and so on. But broken promises sting, hurt, they aren't soon forgotten. Many of you have experienced your fair share of broken promises. But also, I don't doubt many of you have broken your own fair share of promises too. We stand condemned before God when it comes to our words, our broken promises. Jesus' words from Matt.12:36-37 should haunt us and make us think twice about what we say and promise: “I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Our text from John 1:43-51 brings up how different God is from us. God is one who keeps his promises, He fulfills His promises, He acts on His promises, all of them. During Advent, we lighted candles as we waited for Messiah and sang how “God fulfills His promise.” The Lord of heaven and earth is a promise-making and promise-keeping Lord. He’s not a promise breaking, lying through His teeth Lord. As St. Paul says 2 Corinthians 1:20 – “For in him [Christ] every one of God’s promises is a “Yes.” Or, as the Lord spoke through the prophet Isaiah (55:10-11) long before Paul, “...as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth...so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” In other words, God is going to do what He says He’s going to do. Some of the first disciples, Philip and Nathanael (aka Bartholomew) get a whiff of these sweet promises of God being fulfilled right before their eyes in Jesus Christ.

Philip just heard from Peter and Andrew about Jesus; Peter and Andrew just heard about Jesus from John the Baptist. These deep men of faith searched the Scriptures and saw how the promise Moses gave to Israel in Deuteronomy 18:15 – “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet” – that promise is right here and right now being fulfilled in Christ. Or as Philip says, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote!” Well what about the others prophets? What did God promise through them about Jesus? We heard one last week as we celebrated Epiphany from Micah 5:2 - “...from you [Bethlehem] shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.” Isaiah 7:14 we often hear during Advent and Christmas too: “...virgin is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.” Zechariah 9:9 promises Jesus entry into Jerusalem with these inspired words–

“...your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” Psalms 2 and 110 promise and sing about the coming King of Israel.

And one last promise God made to Daniel (7:13-14), and ultimately to us:

“I saw one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.”

This is why Jesus calls himself the “Son of Man.” He’s the one who fulfills the Lord’s promised redemption to Israel and to the whole world. God makes promises. God keeps promises. His promises might take a few hundred years to be fulfilled – Moses lived a good 1300 to 1500 years before Jesus was born; Isaiah lived almost 600 years before Jesus; Micah lived a little over 500 years before Jesus; Daniel lived over 400 years before Jesus was born, before the eternal Son of God became man in Jesus Christ. But this isn’t a sermon on patience, this is a sermon the divine, eternal promises of God!

Let’s get back to Philip and Nathanael. They get a whiff of these sweet promises of God being fulfilled in Christ right before their eyes, and what do they do? In verse 46 Nathanael asks Philip: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Meaning, “...this is *too good to be true*. *The* Messiah? *The* long awaited for Davidic king and divine Shepherd? He’s from where? From Nazareth? (Nathanael didn’t know Jesus was born in Bethlehem like we do.) And what possibly could come from that podunk, backwater town in the middle of nowhere?” It’d be like someone from Green Bay or Marquette saying, “Trenary? Perkins? Who of importance could ever come from there!” Needless to say, Jesus a little later puts Nathanael in his place; but he does it in a way that’s gentle. In verse 47 Jesus affirms Nathanael: “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” Meaning, Nathanel is a good guy, a trustworthy guy. He knows his Bible. He

knows that in regards to the story of redemption, Nazareth is not a part of the picture really. Galilee, the larger geographic area where Nazareth was located, was talked about in Isaiah 9:1 as a promised area of God's redeeming activity, but Nazareth specifically, not so much. So Jesus applauds Nathanael because he knew his Bible; he knew the promises that God made and he knew that God keeps his promises too. This is also why they follow Jesus. Not only are they seeing right before their very eyes the Lord's long awaited for promises becoming realized in Jesus Christ, but they're getting a whiff of the promise-giving, promise-making, promise-keeping God who is up to something so amazing, so marvelous, that they don't want to be left out. Like grandma who is trying to hide a fresh apple pie that just came out of the oven, Jesus just can't help but to attract to himself the minds and hearts of sinful people who have broken promises left and right, who want, need, crave the joy and hope of God again in their lives. King David sang these words long ago: Psalm 16:11 – "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."

We easily are promise breakers. God is not. God is a promise keeper; he is a promise maker; he is a promise fulfiller, he fulfills his promises because he loves to. He loves to love; he loves to have His redeemed people delight in Him, to savor his presence, to follow Jesus in whom are "...pleasures forevermore." My challenge to you this week as you read your Bibles, like Nathanael did, I want you to search all over the place for God's promises. What are His promises to the world? To the church? To those who have been redeemed by His blood? To those who love Jesus, who have been chosen by Jesus, who listen to Jesus, who follow Jesus, who have inhaled the succulent aroma of Jesus' love and power, who delight in the joy of the Son of God, the Son of Man, the King of Israel, the Savior, the Messiah, the one upon whom angels will

ascend and descend upon because he is the Word made flesh, God incarnate. Search the Scriptures for God's promises; they're all over the place. And why? So that you know this Lord can be trusted, can be counted on, can be relied on, because He is the Lord of sea and sky who has promised salvation, healing; who has promised to shine his magnificent light in the midst of your darkness, who feeds us now with His Word and Sacrament, and will satisfy all the deepest longings of our hearts.

HOD: WOV # 752 – “I, the Lord of Seas and Sky”