

Sunday, February 25, 2018

Genesis 17:1-7.15-16

Mark 8: 31-38

A Promise Worth Keeping

Yakov Smirnoff is a Russian comedian who emigrated to the US and he was not prepared for the incredible variety of products available in grocery stores, especially ready made or instant products. When he first went shopping he saw –powdered milk,-- just add water and you get milk; he saw juice mix- again you just add water and you get orange juice. Then he saw something called baby powder—and thought—what a country—just add water and you get a baby!

We are continuing in our Lenten journey to the cross and with our focus on Covenants or promises God made with people many years ago, Commandments which teach us God's laws, and the Cross of Jesus, we will learn more about what it means to be Christian followers or disciples of Jesus.

What does it mean to be Christian today? Well, I might ask this question to our Scouting and Guiding youth? What does it mean to be Scouts/ guides? One of the first things that is taught to the youth at each level of scouting and guiding is the promise. We have heard these youth share their promises this morning. Some are still stumbling over the words, some have no problem stating these words and some truly speak them from the heart. This is because the promises have become so much more than something you have to learn in order to get a badge!

As Christians we too make promises. These promises include believing in the one whom God sent his Son Jesus and that He is our Saviour. We believe that He is the one who died and rose again for our sakes and that the Holy Spirit is with us, leading and guiding us always. We believe this because God in his love for us promised us that the saviour would come, and this is Jesus. And we believe in Jesus because he taught his followers knowing that he would have to die and rise again.

As Christians we also promise to serve in his church as we are called to do for the church is where we continue to grow in our faith, it is where learning to love others and caring for others grows. But it is not instant.

The Russian comedian joked about instant everything yet when we talk about being and becoming Christian it is not instant. Yes there is a moment when we do say yes to Jesus- some traditions call this repentance and renewal or even a longer word- sanctification of the believer

that is an experience of the holy one. But it is the moment of change from what one was to what one begins—life as a follower of Jesus.

Comparatively, until you make your promise as a Brownie /Cub or Guide/ Scout for the first time you are not quite a brownie/cub or guide/scout. But when you can state those promises from memory, from the heart—you are a part of the international brothers and sisters of Scouting and Guiding over 110 years old and still ongoing!

God made a promise to Abraham and Sarah a long time ago—that they would be the parents of many generations of people. As many as there are stars in the skies they would have generations of people to follow them. Their first reaction on hearing this—they laughed out loud. How could they be parents of all those generations? They did not yet have one child! But God made this promise- also known as a covenant. And it eventually occurred Sarah and Abraham had Isaac. If we read the Bible we learn of more of their family who remained faithful to God.

As Christians we learn and grow every day about what it means to live as Jesus taught; according to God's laws and in relationship with each other. Lord and Lady Baden-Powell were Christians and they incorporated these teachings of how to live and work together into Scouting and Guiding. That is why many churches support and sponsor groups across the country. One foundational teaching is to love God and live according to His ways.

But all Christians at some point in their life make promises in order to be recognized as a child of God and to have hope and trust in God throughout their life. Unfortunately, there is no instant powder that enables disciples of Jesus Christ to know what to say and do. Christians are slowly raised through many trials, suffering, and temptations. A study has found that only 11 percent of churchgoing teenagers have a well-developed faith, rising to only 32 percent for churchgoing adults. Why? Because true-life change only begins at salvation, takes more than just time, is about training, trying, suffering, and even dying. So this is why it is so important for the church to reach out to others in order to make disciples, to teach others about God and his covenants, promises, and how to live. It is very important that the church also teach about Jesus.

Jesus knew his purpose and he promised God the Father that he would fulfill it- he was born, to live, to teach, to die and to rise again for the sake of everyone else. We read that Jesus taught his disciples that he was going to suffer, be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law; he knew he was going to die and also rise again. And he taught those listening to follow him. He taught them and us that to truly be his disciples we need to live out

the promises we make- every day- not just when it is convenient or easy or not too demanding. No matter what we are to keep the promises we make and live out our faith.

As we worship together today let us remember that God loves you and that you are not alone no matter what happens in your life. As a church family- we are here to walk with you, to share with you and to be with you in times of celebration and in times of sadness. We support the Guiding/Scouting movement knowing that young people will grow up knowing that the promises you make will be among many promises you will take throughout your life. And if you fulfil your scouting/guiding promises you will live and be recognized in faith and with hope.

May God bless you always just as God blesses all who profess their faith and keep their promises of who they are in Jesus Christ.Amen.