



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God, the Creator of the Universe, and the Lord, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World. Amen.

This is a sermon about making promises. This is also a sermon about breaking promises because our lives are actually filled with promises. We make promises to ourselves whenever we want to try to be a better version of ourselves than we are today. I promise to pay attention to the present and not worry about the past or the future. I promise I am not going to get angry when things don't go my way. We make promises to protect ourselves, to correct ourselves, to behave ourselves to better ourselves so that life can look differently for us.

We make promises when we want to break old habits and develop new ones. I promise that I'm going to get up every morning and exercise. I promise I'm going to do one work of mercy every month. I promise I'm going to go to all the AA meetings that I can because it's going to make me feel better about me and it's going to save me.

And we make promises to others. These are deep expressions and acts of love. I promise to love and to cherish you until we are parted by death. We make pledges to one another so that we can cooperate with each other, we can collaborate with each other, and work in our neighborhoods, in our schools, in our houses of faith. And we promise in society to obey the laws that govern all of us.

And then there are those promises that we make between us and God. These promises are made in the deep interior of our soul, and with a community of faith. We promise God to believe, to trust, and to know that God loves us. We promise God we'll care for our neighbor, and we'll share what has been first given to us. We promise to rely on God and renew our faith.

You know, your life, it's filled with promises, and that means that you're operating out of hope. What are the active promises in your life right now, today? When you make promises, it gives you purpose. It gives you meaning. It's the possibility of transformation of something that you actually cannot see. You're actually living out of a place of abundance because you believe in something that has yet to come and has yet to be seen, and yet you are going to promise that it's going to happen, and that's operating out of abundance. Good for you.

When we make promises, we are being quite breathtakingly beautiful as human beings. But here's the thing. Promises that are broken can devastate us. Our parents neglect us. Our spouse cheats on us. Our leaders lie to us. Our neighbor doesn't take care of us. Our friend betrays us. When people break promises, the pain is profound because the breach is seismic. You relied on that person and it blew up in your face.

I had the heartbreaking privilege of walking with a family whose son was battling drug addiction, and it was just terrible. It was very, very painful. The mother and the father, they would fight constantly, trying to figure out what to do next. One wanted to practice unconditional love for the son. The other one wanted to practice tough love for the son, and honestly, neither one worked. The son would make promises to them, saying he was going to stop using. He wasn't going to steal from them anymore. He wasn't going to bring his friends into his bedroom and put his little sister who was in the next bedroom in harm's way. And he broke all of the promises.

And each time that the promise was broken, parents felt failure. They felt betrayal, and they began to go numb. And the son, he lived in agony as well. He wanted so badly to be able to keep his promises and he hated hurting his family, and he was stuck. He couldn't break the cycle. Broken promises are one of the most painful experiences we face. They leave us unmoored. They make us angry. They threaten our sense of security and our wellbeing. They create havoc in our lives, and we don't know what to feel. We don't know what to believe. We don't know what to trust.

And then there's that other problem when we break promises. This is what's happening actually in the book of Joshua. To be actually more accurate, it's about what's going to happen in the next book, the Book of Judges, which happens right after Joshua. So I want to explain this passage from Joshua, and I want to use it as a lens in making and then breaking promises.

So unfortunately our passage from the Book of Joshua, there's just like no way you can contextualize what is actually happening. because we're kind of just airdropped into the middle of this story. And it's an amazing, awe-striking scene that we have here. We have all the people of Israel, thousands and thousands of people who have gathered today to see and hear their leader, Joshua. He is the spiritual, he's the military leader of the Israelites, and these Israelites have been wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. And he's gathered all the people together for a farewell speech.

And together, this group, they've weathered some difficult storms. They've dealt with the death of Moses, the one who got them out of captivity. They've wandered in this desert without food or water, and finally they conquered the

people and entered into the land that was promised to them by God, the land of Canaan, flowing with milk and with honey.

And now at this juncture, Joshua wants to see, are they willing to make a promise? Are the people willing to make a promise given that God kept his promise to them? So Joshua says to the gathered, put away your gods that your ancestors serve and serve the Lord. If you're unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

So it's promise time. And what do the people do? Well, they recount everything that the Lord has done for them already. The Lord got them out of Egypt. The Lord delivered them from slavery. The Lord protected them in the wilderness. The Lord gave them land so they declare yes, we will also serve the Lord for He is our God. And it doesn't take but a chapter and a half for them to break that promise. The very next book, the Book of Judges, you hear about the death of Joshua and the very next verse after Joshua dies, it says, then the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and they abandoned the Lord just like that.

And the rest of the Old Testament, you know what it is? It's basically a story of promises made by the people and promises broke by the people over and over again. And in fact, it wasn't until writing this sermon that I realized that that is actually a thread throughout the whole entire Old Testament. Over and over promises are made. Yes, we promise we won't eat from that tree. Yes, we're not going to worship other gods. Yeah, we're not going to exploit the poor. And over and over again, these promises are broken.

And the question is, what does this mean? Does it mean that it's a waste of our time to make promises? Does it mean that we should just stop because we all know promises get broken? Does it mean that God one day is going to get fed up with us because we keep making promises and we can't keep them, and just like the prophets have warned us?

Let me offer an alternative to giving up on promises and give you maybe a way to flourish so that you can make promises and to be cared for when promises are broken. And in order to explain this to you, I need two parts and I'm calling them part one, the metaphor, and part two, the wedding. So part one, the metaphor. In the Gospel of John, we encounter the metaphor.

It's in John chapter six, and it's part of this really, really, really long discourse that Jesus embarks on, which is called the Bread of Life Discourse. And it's called the Bread of Life Discourse because it starts with Jesus saying, I'm the bread of life. So you would think that given all the talking that Jesus does about the bread of life, that we would understand what that means, and I mean, He does kind of try. But He goes on and on and on, and He talks about like believing in Him. And if you do, then you won't die. But if you eat and don't believe, you'll have no life in

you. And so by the end, even the disciples are scratching their heads and they're like, uh, what is He saying? We don't understand. This teaching is too difficult.

And honestly, I'm going to tell you the truth. I feel the same way. I have studied the Bread of Life Discourse for decades, and I find it convoluted, bewildering, and very strange. But then I ask the question, what does this metaphor mean to me? What does it mean that God comes down to give us Jesus, and that Jesus is the bread of life? And I realized that what I'm longing for and what I think we are all longing for in this world is nourishment from the source of life. Which brings me to part two, the wedding.

So last week we had a beautiful wedding in the church that presented some important logistical problems. So most weddings happen on Saturday, and as you know, we have a weekly Saturday 5:00 PM worship service here in the church. And most couples want to get married as close to dinner time as possible so they can go from the great wedding to the great reception. But because of our Saturday 5:00 PM service, our wonderful altar guild, this is an amazing group of humans who lovingly and with great jubilation with one another, they set the table for Eucharist with bread and with wine. They actually need some time to do all that work.

So our plan is to have Saturday weddings at the latest start at 3:00 PM. So you get the couple in, they process in, you do prayers, you have a couple readings, you have a short sermon. You then do the vows. You have some prayers, they kiss, off they go, and then they come back and they have pictures. Lots and lots and lots and lots of pictures, and then you kind of usher them out and then the altar guild can come and set up the table. And if everything works out, we have everything set by the 5:00 PM service.

And I want you all to join the altar guild! Yes, it's an amazing opportunity to serve in this great capacity where you're basically every weekend holding a dinner party for hundreds of people. I mean, talk to me about joining this fun loving group who serve joyfully, or better yet, you know what? After service, go to the high altar and you can help them and see what they do.

Okay. Enough with the commercial. Back to the wedding. So this wedding last week was unusual in that this gorgeous couple decided that they actually wanted to have Eucharist at the wedding. And this is actually really rare. So now we're adding time. And then I discovered that this beautiful couple invited 240 of their closest friends to this wedding. Giving Communion to 240 people means like there's no way we're getting done close enough for the altar guild to leisurely set everything up, because now they have to tear down the Eucharist from the wedding and then set up for the 5:00 PM service.

And I thought, well, okay, there's two places of hope that we can get done at a certain time. And the first hope was a short sermon at the wedding. Well, that

hope was dashed because I was the preacher, and that darn sermon went on and on and on, just like this one. My second hope was that not all 240 people would want Communion. Now, I know that's a strange hope, but I need to tell you that is not unrealistic because I'm sure y'all know, fewer and fewer people know what Holy Communion is, let alone want to take it. So I thought, well, if only a couple folks participate in the Eucharist, we'll be in great shape and the altar guild will get there in time.

So when it came time to explain Communion, I looked at these 240 blank faces and they really didn't know what we were doing. And so I did what we usually do at funerals and tried to explain it a little saying, you know, well the Eucharist is the table, it's set for all. God invites all of you there. And I gave them the logistics, like, put your hand out like this and I'll put wafer there. And there's cups and you can drink or dip. And they still all stared at me blankly. So I said to them, I want you to know this. The God who made you wants you to know how much He deeply loves you and is taking care of you. God wants to refresh you, repair you, and rejuvenate you, and God is doing so by gifting Himself to you, using the most simple objects, some food and some drink, to get as close to you as God can, to whisper to you everything is going to be okay for you.

Everybody came and we finished very, very late, but our rockstar altar guild, who had less than 10 minutes to do it all, did it. And that is when I realized that all of us need to be nourished in this life filled with dreams and despair, filled with vows and broken promises. We need the bread of life to sustain us so we can have the hope to believe that we can make promises to ourselves, to others, and to God, and we can believe in a different future, and we need the bread of life to comfort us when we break our promises or broken promises break us. The bread of life is what Jesus is and Jesus gives us the constant nourishment of hope and of grace and of forgiveness so you can go back to your life and try again.

God says to you, here, I know that things aren't working out, and I know that you may be disappointed, hurt, angry, struggling. I know that you are experiencing defeat, but I want to feed you. I want to nourish you, and so I'm giving you Myself again. I am giving you the bread of life. Life is what I am giving you, and now you have it. So go back and make those promises and go back and believe in the promises given to you, and I will sustain you through it all. And that's a promise.

Amen.