

Promises

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[0 : 0 0] I swear by Almighty God that the evidence I shall give shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. If you've ever stood in court or had to stand in court to give evidence, you will know what a hefty promise that is. The thing is, you will have a lot of very, very clever people who have trained a long time, who will exercise your mind as to whether you are telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, because that is their job.

And to make that oath a solemn promise is invoking the divine. That's what it says in the definition, that you are invoking the divine regarding one's future action or behavior.

There are two things that are easily broken. One is X, and one is promises. It's easy to do that. Shirley MacLaine said, is quoted as saying when she was talking about promises, never believe what somebody is saying, one, when they are drunk, and two, when they're running for president. It's about accountability. It's about accountability to God. And this morning, we all sat there. We all made our covenant promises. We all made that covenant promise. We didn't have to hold the Bible. We didn't have to swear, because we're not in front of a barrister, and we're not in front of a solicitor or a judge. We are in front of God, who knows the secrets of all our hearts.

And I was looking at this, and I thought, actually, covenantal promises are so easily made, but sadly, so easily broken. Because as Paul says in our reading here this morning, he is urging his church. He's urging his fellow believers, because he knows the consequences of what broken promises look like. It's important to Paul, because Paul knew what it meant to have a transformational life.

He knew what it was like for a life to be transformed. As Paul was walking down this Damascus road with his sole intention to wipe out all these followers of Christ, and that was his sole intention, to have that transformational moment that not only changed his life, but to change his perspective, but most of all, to change his heart. Some here will know what that transformational moment of the Holy Spirit is like in our lives. Some will be sat here desiring that change of circumstance in their life, to say, I want that change. I want something new. And as we promised earlier, Paul says, I urge you.

[3 : 2 7] It's no wondering that Paul urges us, because he knows. He knows what that change was like, and longs for us, for each and every one of us to have that. And as we promised earlier, I am no longer my own, but yours. Put me to what you will. That's a hefty promise we have made this morning. If we've said those words and meant those in our hearts, it's a transformational.

Now, Mandy will tell you there are a few things in promises that I make that truly can't be relied upon. Confession time. And I remember one particular day, and this was a particular day when Mandy was expecting a parcel to be delivered. The conversation went something like this. Are you at home this morning? Yes, I am. I'm working from home. That's really good, because there's a parcel arriving that needs signing for, and I need you to be here. Yet, don't worry, I'll be here. Are you sure? Yes, I will be here. I'm working from home. It'll be delivered between two. Yes, I will be here, Mandy.

I promise. Don't worry. Now, it wasn't my fault that there was no milk in the fridge. And the shop was a short distance away. Can you imagine as I walked back up the street, and I saw the van driving away? If only he had looked in his rearview mirror and seen this demented person waving milk at him. And then you arrive there and you see the note, the note of doom that says, I am so sorry I missed you. Not half as sorry as I am, mate. I'll tell you.

And the strap line for this firm was, a promise isn't fulfilled until it's delivered. That's like rubbing salt into your wound.

Needless to say, promises are easily broken. In our confession, when we make confession, in the old book it says that we confess to you, Lord, our faults and our failings, and that there is no health in us. It's what it says in the old book. I'll tell you, there is a real dread that there will be no health in me that afternoon when Mandy arrived home.

[6 : 11] But in this thing it says, do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. It's so easy to make the promises in good faith, but fail to deliver.

And that's where we need the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. You'll have noticed that there there's leaflets on your chairs to take away and read. And it's about our sharing and our giving in 2000.

I was in a church for a long time when the vicar used to talk to the church once a year on one Sunday, and his line was, I don't want to take your fun money from you. I never really understood what that meant. What does that term, your fun money? Because I think the church had interpreted this, that all of their money was their fun money, so that's why they didn't give any to the church. And I'm glad Mike, if you listened to Mike's sermon last week, Mike talked about Malachi. And Malachi preached to a people who had never really grasped this sense of what God had given them. And in fact, what had happened in the church was you would get these sayings like, I'd like to, we've just had new carpets put throughout the house. We've had the old ones for 30 years. There's still somewhere in them.

Would the church like it? I said, yes, it's bonfire night coming up. And we'd love to have them. I've bought a new flat screen TV. I was wondering whether the church would like the old one for our youth group. It only needs a couple of new valves. Do you get the picture? Well, not on this TV.

But it was that sense of Malachi talking to a people. And Malachi said, a son honours his father and a slave honours his master. If I am a father, where is the honour that's due to me?

[8 : 30] If I'm a master, where is the respect that's due to me, says the Lord Almighty? You ask, how have we shown contempt for your name? By offering to fied food at the altar.

You bring me sacrifices of blind animals. You bring sacrifices of lame and diseased animals. Try offering them to your governor. Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you, says the Lord? There's this essence, isn't it, about bringing our second best. And Paul is saying to us, and our covenant promises say, bring the best that we can. And Lord, we promise to do that. Will you help us hold to that? Will you help us hold to those promises in the power of your spirit? I think there's a theme here about honouring God. I couldn't help, you know, but notice really that in those promises, God sees our heart. And if God sees our heart, we want it to be the best that it can be an honest and true in what we're promising.

I guess Paul's words resonate with me this morning. And any of this this morning in Paul's reading in our covenant promises is nothing about making us guilty. You know, I was brought up high Anglo-Catholic. I do guilt very well. In fact, I do it very well. But none of this is to make us feel guilty. I sensed this morning as I was looking at this to think about what it might be for a life that's transformed. What does it look like in our promises of God's promise to us and reciprocating our promise to him of what that looks like in our lives? What would that look like for our work?

What would that look like in a life transformed in our parenting, in our caring, in our sharing, in our giving? What would that look like to the community as a church as we look out?

Because like all of us, I can abdicate those promises. You know, I give to the Dogs Trust, I give to the Cats League, I do this, I do my bit, whatever. But if the church isn't here, who sees that in our community? A people of God living together and serving.

[11 : 10] Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing, and perfect will. It helps us focus. It's like having a new set of glasses. We can see again. We can see freshly.

Maybe we've said it again and again, but now we see it. We are a transformed people. I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. And that's where I am this morning. If we want freedom, then we have to dispose of some of the stuff that holds us back from having that freedom. What holds me back from having that freedom? I'll tell you. From my own book, there is greed, there is love of money, there may be selfishness, there may be coveting, wanting the new thing, there may be not being satisfied with what I have, there may be that sense of storing things up. Some of those things in my life, and I'm sure in yours, I need to let go of in order to have this freedom to be able to do what we, God asks us to do.