

7th Sunday of Easter
Year C - 2/6/2019

Acts 16:16-34
Psalm 97
Revelation 22:12-22
John 17:20-26

In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...

A few weeks ago now, as our daily news was being saturated with coverage of the upcoming Federal Election, I heard a wonderful joke. A young child was sitting down with Dad to read the obligatory bed-time story, and she asked her father, “Daddy, do all fairy tales begin ‘once upon a time’”? Her father thought for a moment, and replied “no, darling some of them begin ‘when I am elected, I promise I will...’”

We may laugh or smile, but I suspect you know the depressing truth that lies behind the humour. After all, there is nothing more certain these days, it seems, no matter which side of politics is in power, than the certainty of broken election promises.

I have to say, I am rather weary of empty promises. You know what I mean I am sure -- those promises publicly expressed by political candidates, those promises made by a family member who has let you down one too many times, those things said by friends in whom you just simply cannot believe anymore, those institutions, including the church, that make promises for God they have no business making.

And I am sure you know exactly how it feels.

The breaking of a promise, a promise not fulfilled, goes beyond disappointment, beyond a sense of sadness, beyond mere frustration. It is, instead, heartbreaking because you needed to believe; you trusted, and you allowed yourself to be vulnerable to another’s actions.

The end result is not only trying to figure out how to negotiate your feelings about the other, but also how to figure out what to do with the end result within yourself.

For the breaking of a promise is at the same time both cause for a reevaluation of the one who broke the promise and also of yourself -- why did I think I could believe in this person, this system, in the first place? What's wrong with me? Why couldn't I see the truth?

Then, of course, there is the sobering recognition of the other aspect of promises, when you begin to remember and realize the promises *you* have made and broken. And you know that what *you* feel when you experience a broken promise is exactly what you have made others feel -- and that is not a comfortable place to be in.

What do broken promises have to do with the Easter season, and with resurrection, you may well wonder? Simply put, it is this: resurrection is a promise that was not broken, cannot be broken, will not be broken -- ever. God risks the incarnation, God's love, God's commitment, God's very self on this promise.

If there is just one thing that we might remember about resurrection, one thing we need to hear on this, the last Sunday of the season of Easter, one thing that maybe I need to remember myself as I farewell another Easter season? Resurrection is a promise; a promise kept -- pure and simple. There are a lot of empty promises that make up our lives, but resurrection isn't one of them. And some days, perhaps many days, all we need is one promise we know won't be broken to make it through the day.

We might say, "well, of course, that's all well and good." It's easy to say that. Although I suspect some days are easier than others (and indeed some days it is harder than others), to say that resurrection is a promise we can believe in.

But let's think a little more about it. What difference might it make that at the end of the day, this is a promise that is real; that when no one else comes through, God does; when there seems to be little to count on, you can count on resurrection -- for both your future and your present.

Resurrection is sometimes relegated to a belief of the church to which we simply comply and that which we by rote confess. It might even be thought of as being in the same box as the complexity of the Trinity, or the expectation of the second coming - it might be considered as just another dogma of the church.

We go through the motions each Easter, and state it each time the creed is said, but how often do we stop and say that resurrection makes a difference for how I live my day today? What might it feel like to know that the promise of the resurrection is mine now?

I think that's in part what Jesus is praying for in the passage we hear today -- for the disciples to be able to hear that his resurrection is a promise to believe in. It's why Paul and Silas were praying to God while in prison. Rescue from prisons, rescue from death, are promises God makes and which God keeps. Why? "Because as Psalm 97 reminds us, "Light dawns for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart".

So, what if we believe that resurrection is promise, is our promise, is yours and my promise? That it is a given. That it's the one thing you can count on. How does that change your present? How does that shape how you live? How does that influence your own promises to others?

This latter section of Jesus' prayer in John is a clue to what the resurrection promise might mean. "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Here, Jesus prays for those who have yet to believe. God loves the world - this we know. But how can the world know this promise that will indeed be kept without us living this resurrection promise on a daily basis?

That is to say, God counts on us to embody God's promise in a world of broken ones. God needs us to give witness to the ultimate promise kept when our experience, knows only empty promises.

It's a big deal - sure. But it is our calling as Christians. To live into the promise of the resurrection that we celebrated 7 weeks ago, and that we have been reminded of through each of the past Sundays since.

God invites us, calls us, and challenges us, to live in the promise that is truly ours forever -- that is the resurrection difference.

The Lord be with you.