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Lent 5

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Promise Fulfilled”

Text: Mark 10:32-45; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 5:1-10

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Has anyone ever broken a promise made to you? Have you ever broken a promise you made? I don't know of *anyone* who would say no to either of those questions. In fact, it happens so much in our world today that we even have a saying about it! *Promises are made to be broken*. Meaning: promises are made with no intention of keeping them.

That secret you promised not to tell a soul? But you just had to tell *someone*! What about the marriage vow: to be faithful unto death? How many routinely, and sometimes serially, break that? It's hard to keep promises. Times change. Situations change. The quote I mentioned: *Promises are made to be broken*, actually, originally was, when it was coined in the 17th century: *Promises, like pie-crust, are made to be broken*. They are by nature fragile and not meant to last.

We've come a long way from another saying about promises, when in the 4th century BC Aristotle said: *A promise made must be a promise kept*. Promises just aren't thought of that way by most anymore. If I can, I will. As long as it doesn't cost me too much, I will. As long as nothing better or more important come along, I will. That is more likely.

So maybe in our day and age, we should have a new saying, to reflect the times; something like: *Promises, like the date on a gallon of milk, are meant to expire*. They're only good for so long. And beyond that . . . ? Well, you take your chances.

This change has come at a cost. Broken marriages. Broken friendships. A general lack of trust that has settled in. No one expects people, like politicians, to keep their promises anymore. We hope they do. But aren't we surprised when they do? And when you learn you cannot rely on someone else, then it's every man for himself. You are the only one you can count on. Which is sad. That's not how we were created to be. It's not good for the man to be alone. Satan continues to divide and conquer.

And not just to divide us from one another, but to divide us from God. To divide us from God by getting us to project our unreliability, our untrustworthiness, onto Him. So, does God hear your prayer? Well, He *promised* to, but . . . That's satan hissing doubt into your ear: But can you rely on that promise? Can you trust God? Doesn't it really depend on

whether you're worthy? Whether you're good enough, and praying the right way? And what about forgiveness? Does God fully and freely forgive you? Well, He *promised* to, but . . . But you've sinned too much. You don't really think He will forgive you over and over and over again, do you? Would you?

And with this, faith is eroded. Little by little, bit by bit. For we put our faith in the words and promises of God, that what He said He will do; what He promised is and will be fulfilled. But if we can't trust those promises . . . then where does faith go? **On myself.** To make myself worthy. To make myself deserving of God's favor. And then satan will do one of two things: (1.) puff you up with pride, that you are, in fact, doing just that! You are worthy! Better than most. Why, you don't even need God that much! Just a bit, you know. Now and then. Until *now* becomes less and less, and *then* becomes more and more, and God gradually fades from your life. Or if not that, then: (2.) satan will crush you with despair, that you'll never be worthy, that you'll never be good enough. That you're nothing to God. So in the first case, God becomes nothing to you, and in the second case, you become nothing to God. And the divide is complete.

You may not be at either of those places right now, but do not think you are immune. Who among us hasn't been prideful? Who hasn't been despairing? Who among us hasn't been led down those roads a step or two . . . or more! . . . by satan trying to tempt us, lead us, lure us away from God? I've been down both roads. You?

But today we heard of our God who both *makes* and *keeps* His promises. Not sometimes, not when it is convenient, not when it is easy, and not when we deserve it - but because He is faithful and trustworthy. A God we can rely on and count on and believe in. A God who will lay down His life for us. To save us.

And so Jesus goes to Jerusalem to die. We heard Him say those words again today. ***See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.*** But this is not first time Jesus spoke such words. It is *the third time*, in fact, that we are told of. Today was from Mark chapter 10. In Mark chapter 8, Jesus told His disciples this, but with even stronger words - this **must** happen, He says. It *must*, because He promised. And then in Mark chapter 9, Jesus tells them this again, right after the glory of His Transfiguration. There, He says, this **is** going to happen. He is going to fulfill His promise to lay down His life for the life of the world. And then here, in chapter 10, He says for the third time, that this **will** happen. They are now very near Jerusalem, and when they get there, this *will* happen. And then in Mark chapter 11, in words we will hear next week, Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The week begins with Jesus being hailed as king. And, huh. Maybe things will be alright after all. But what Jesus says **must** happen, **is** going to happen, and **will** happen, **does** happen. And the week will end with King Jesus on a cross-shaped throne of wood. Promise kept.

We'll hear the details all next week, that this was no easy promise keeping. From His agony in the Garden, to His betrayal, to the mock trials and false witnesses, to His abuse by the soldiers, His flogging by Pilate, and then the pain of the cross. But the words and promises are ironclad. What He says, He does. What He promises, is fulfilled. Reliable, trustworthy, faithful. That is your God.

And we need to keep hearing that because satan keeps telling us different, and the world keep telling us different, and our experience keeps teaching us different. But God is different. And Jesus shows us that. Making His way to Jerusalem *knowing* what will happen there. But He will not be deterred. Your life is far too important for Him not to go.

For if Jesus was going to give up on anyone, it would have been His disciples! The first time He told them of His crucifixion, Peter rebuked Him. The second time, they argue about which of them is the greatest. And the third time, James and John can think only of their own glory and getting the places of honor. Really? But Jesus did not give up on them, **and He does not give up on you**. Jesus fulfills His high priestly vocation. He establishes the new testament in His blood. So that what He said is true: ***I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.***

That is surely one of the sweetest and most comforting promises in all of Scripture. Your ***iniquity***, your guilt, is ***forgiven***; and your ***sin*** - all your evil thoughts, words, deeds, and desires, are ***remembered no more***. Which doesn't mean that an all-knowing God forgot them! We forget things. We forget things because our brains don't work the way they should. God doesn't forget as we do. Rather, He says here, that ***I will remember their sins no more***. That's different. When you forget something, you might un-forget it later - it might come back to your mind. But not with God. Your sins aren't coming back. Because He didn't just forget them, **He dealt with them**. He took them away from you and put them on His Son on the cross. Jesus paid the price for them with His death, was buried in the tomb, and then rose without them. So your sins cannot separate you from God anymore. The division satan seeks and is working for, has been overcome by Jesus; by the one who was God and man in one person, overcoming that division in His own flesh and blood.

I think it's interesting that these three statements of Jesus about His death and resurrection are bracketed by Him giving sight to blind men. Just before the first time He speaks of His cross, He heals a blind man; and right after the third time that we heard today, He heals another blind man. Could be coincidence. But maybe not. Maybe Jesus on the cross is what opens our eyes and enables us to see God as He really is: the promise-keeping, reliable, steadfast, trustworthy, faithful God. And not sometimes, not when it is convenient, not when it is easy, and not when we deserve it, but even when it meant the death of His own Son.

So we've been singing all this Lenten season, *let us fix our eyes on Jesus* (Gradual). For that is what makes all the difference in the world. The difference while we live, and the difference when we die. The difference when things are going well, and the difference when things are falling apart. The difference when we are filled with pride, and the difference when we despair. Through all the ups and downs of this world and life, that is what remains the same, consistent, and unchangeable: the love of God for you in Jesus, in Christ crucified. The Word of God made flesh, and the Word of God who fulfills all the words and promises of God. All for you. For your life. For your salvation.

So come now and fix your eyes - your eyes of faith - on Jesus as He comes and feeds you with His Body and Blood. Here is the new testament in Jesus blood. Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And so as you hear, *the true body and blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* - of the faithful and steadfast one - *will keep and preserve you steadfast unto everlasting life*. And so we can *depart in peace*.

So are you a sinner? Come, take and eat. Are you a promise-breaker? Come, take and eat. Have you been prideful or despairing toward God? Come, take and eat. Have your prayers and good works faltered? Come, take and eat. Have you doubted God and His love for you? Come, take and eat. Are you sorry for who you are and what you have been and want to do better? Come, take and eat. And depart in peace, ***your sins are remembered no more***. Not now, not ever. He promised. And this season of Lent shows us: **promise fulfilled**.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.