



Jim Brasel
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GENESIS 12,1-9

Promises: this is a place of promises.

--Parents bring newly born children here to this baptismal font....they make promises about the teaching of those children....about sharing the faith with them....and we make promises about doing our part to teach those children the ways of God seen in Jesus of Nazareth.

--Couples stand here and make promises....promises so life-changing, life-creating, that we call those promises by a special name: vows....vows about their lives shared.

39 years ago this month, at the front of a church, I made promises, to be ordained as a minister.

--I knelt on the steps and people very important to me laid hands on me, the act of ordination.

One of those laying hands on me influenced my choice of college and seminary and vocation.

--One was a man who had nourished my involvement and leadership in the youth programs of our church and denomination....who traveled many miles to be part of the promises made.

However imperfectly kept have been the promises made in baptism, marriage, ordination, those promises are more than part of my life: they define my life.

--This is a place of promises.

Newly elected Elders and Deacons make promises in this place this morning as they are ordained and installed as part of this congregation's leadership..

--No, the Deacons and Elders will not be asked the question asked Abram: Elders, Deacons, will you leave your home and family...your job....your pension and health care benefits... and go live in a far country totally strange to you?

Abram did all that on the basis of a promise....a promise that he would be blessed...that he would become the father of a great nation.

Have you ever reflected on how much of our lives are, just as Abraham's, founded on promises?

Consider the Elders and Deacons this morning: "do you promise to exercise your ministry diligently and faithfully, showing forth the love of Christ?"

--On the basis of promises, Deacons and Elders have shaped their lives to make room for hours of thought and prayer and work....a three year commitment to their ministry.

--In our daily lives, we sign contracts, make promises both personal and public.

Back to the Abraham story: the promise on which he based his life didn't seem to be working out—just as not all our promises seem to work out.

--In Abraham's case, you can't be the father of a great nation if you can't even have one child.

Later, God makes the promise more specific: "your wife Sarah shall have a son"...and Sarah's response is to laugh!

--Wouldn't you laugh--if you were promised in your 80's or 90's that you were going to have a child and Medicare would pay for it?!!

God then tells Abraham his descendants will be as numerous as the uncountable stars.

--God's promise confronts Abraham with a choice: on what will you build your life?

Promises face us with the most basic, vital of life's choices:

--To what or whom shall I be unreservedly committed?

--To whom or to what shall I give my life?

This is the question Jesus was asked: "What is the first commandment of all?"

In other words, what am I to put at the center of life....where do I find satisfaction and fulfillment?

--"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength....and love your neighbor as you love yourself."

It is hard to believe in a promise....to live by it, day after day.

Yes, we humans seem to break promises as often as we keep them....which is why promises are often accompanied with an appeal for help beyond ourselves: "so help me God."

--Our promises imitate God's basic promise to us: I will be your God and you will be my people.

What does it mean to live a life-shaping promise?

--To wake every morning with the anticipation that today will somehow be part of the promise.

--To live reverently, deliberately, fully awake to our basic promises.

--Regular reminders are a help....a wedding band on a finger....a title Elder, Deacon, minister.

To live like that is to discover that the blessing of a promise is always with us.

For years Abraham and Sarah lived in the promise.....they lived without losing sight of where they were going or who had set them on their way....not forgetting the hope for a child.

There were lean times and there were rich times....and there finally came that morning when Sarah came to Abraham and, with incredible joy, said, "Abraham, I have something to tell you."

On what promises do we base our lives.....what promises do we choose to make that are the center of who we are?

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