

Promises... Promises:

God's Word is as Good as a Pot of Gold

Adventure Series: Hope

Advent Week 1 - Nov, 28th, 2021

Rev.Rynn Parraw

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Genesis 9: 8-17

Joshua 3: 1-17

Isaiah 54: 9-10

Matthew 14: 22-33

Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. What do these things do when put together? When actually put together they make pure white. When fanned out either through a crystal, or a drop of water, they make one of the most awesome things you will ever see: the rainbow. In my neck of the woods, I see a rainbow at least a few times a week, almost daily this year. The local kids are convinced that it never leaves - but it never gets old. My farmhand still thinks he's going to find that pot of gold. But I know what the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow really is.

The rainbow is a sign of the promise. But you need the clouds and the rain to combine in that perfect way that only God can make in order to see it.

Like the Hebrews crossing the Jordan into the promised land, you need to step out into the water and trust in order for the promise to take effect. If Joshua had hesitated or waited for the water to stop flowing, he never would have made it across. The priests had to wade into the water *before* the stream of flow ceased.

Far too often we are more like the disciples in the boat. We see the storm readily and we see the danger in it, but we cannot see more than a few feet in front of us. We cannot see past the storm.

The disciples saw Christ, but thought he was dead - a ghost drifting towards them. It was too late, even Christ had died in the storm, what chance do we have? They couldn't see that he had come to be with them.

Just like the storm we often see the sacrificed Christ instead of the living Christ. It is easy to remember that we killed him, we see death every day. It's not so hard to believe that Christ died. But to believe, truly believe, that He Lives! That's another story.

Honestly, we doubt. We hold out hope that it will be true but honestly doubt. If you can say with the conviction of ALL your heart AND ALL your soul AND ALL your mind that Christ *lives*, then you are one of very few who ever truly walked with Christ. We all have those moments, however fleeting, where we wonder how right we are. Yes, that's the devil's work, and with as much faith as we have been given, we keep the devil at bay and try our best not to give him that foothold. Still, the moment happened and we beg God's forgiveness for our doubt. If we never doubted then we would never sin. We would know better and would not be able to allow ourselves to do it, knowing what we stand to lose. But, God is patient. He is forgiving.

But, when God loses His patience and rolls out the storm clouds for some smitting, in the clouds and in the rain He sees the rainbow. A gentle and beautiful reminder of that promise: He will never again wipe us out like in the flood.

God's word is His bond. He cannot lie, He cannot change, He does not just change His mind. A promise from Him is as good as if it had already happened. Abram and Sarai were promised a child and descendants that would outnumber the stars, and though He took His time, He supplied. David was promised a lasting dynasty and Christ himself now sits on the throne, Christ promised new life, a new heaven and a new earth, we might as well count it as having already happened.

How do we count that new heaven and new earth as here and now? We do our best to usher it in. We do that by living in such a way that is honourable and pleasing to the Lord. We treat each other with respect, we would feed our enemies and give them the clothes off our backs if we had any enemies, but of course, in the new Jerusalem, we won't have any. So everyone is a friend, is family. Everyone has the ability to live up to their full potential. We can help each other to do that.

We do all of this because we know that God's promise is as good as kept. We are saved - the man you used to be is gone. The you that you want to be and can only be using the strength that God lent you is here and now. He gives that strength. He lends that patience. He even steals time for you to get it all done. No procrastination. Why bother, if everything you are doing is for the Lord wouldn't you want to do as much as you can for Him? Do it the best you can. You have endless time, and energy, and inspiration. You are a teenager again.

The only thing that holds us back is us and our limited perspective, We just can't see through the storm to the other side. Just as much faith as a mustard seed is small can move mountains, so too you can do all things through Christ who gives you strength. The problem is: who really has even that much faith and no doubt?

As our sight is limited, so too are our memories. It only takes moments to forget what we have been told, or asked, or even what we've seen. Peter saw Jesus walk on water, he even climbed out of the boat and started walking himself. But only moments passed and again he saw only the storm, the wind, the waves, and remembered that once upon a time someone told him that humans can't walk on water, and he began to sink. He was terrified, began to sink and cried out for Jesus to save him. I can just imagine the look on Jesus' face. Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed him and asked "Why did you doubt me?"

Jesus told Peter that it was safe. He promised that nothing bad would happen. But Peter hesitated, he doubted, and down he went. When had Jesus ever lied to him before? Why would he doubt him now?

You know the saying: keep your eyes on the prize? Well, he didn't. And it only takes a second for your resolve to crumple and to give doubt and the devil a foothold.

But Jesus had promised nothing bad would happen. God promised that when you commit your life to Him He will always be there with and for you. One of my favourite passages is Romans 12. It neatly sums up what early Christianity (and pretty much the whole New Testament) was made up of. The first few lines say to "make yourself a living sacrifice that is good and pleasing and perfect." I love that line 'living sacrifice' because all I can see is this wriggling thing asked to stand on the altar without being bound, that just won't stay put. That's me.

Continually re-committing my life to God, because Lord knows I don't stay still for very long. I wriggle and squirm and fall right off that pedestal. I hop around and clamour back up with a sheepish apology and stand as still as I can for as long as I can, which isn't that long in all honesty, and then something shiny catches my eye or the wind sweeps me right off that altar and off we go again on another grand adventure wherein inevitably God will be asked to rescue Peter (me), and He will.

Unlike most, I am not afraid of the storm. But I think that's my problem. I love thunder and lightning and rain. The way the wind feels right when the storm is coming. The rumbles, the cracks, the flashes, the way a sound can make your whole house shake and even change your heartbeat. My problem isn't doubt, it's distraction.

When I'm walking on the water towards Jesus' open hands, I don't look around and remember that I'm not supposed to be able to walk on water, I look around and start pointing out "You did that!" in wonder. Not that I worship the thunder instead of the One who made it, but I forget that I was in the middle of something. Perhaps I wouldn't sink, but I would definitely get a few unnecessary waves in the face and lose my breath. Then keep walking another few steps before something else flashes and I stop to revel in how amazing it is. Jesus patiently waits. Soaking wet, and probably tired. He waits.

"I Feel The Winds of God Today" has been one of my favourite hymns. Maybe it's because I love storms. But when I feel the wind of God, I put up my sail and try to contain my excitement for what I am about to witness. Every storm seems to me to be a challenge. The excitement of being rocked by the waves, the wonder of the thunder, the flashes of lightning that just give us enough of a glimpse to know where we're headed (much like in the rest of faith life). And that chance to witness God proving His majesty. All the while I sit and wait for that lesson, that moment where I can clearly see the awesome power that God gives. That moment when you feel invincible in Him, and you know that the promise of life eternal must be true.

Next time you're stuck in the middle of a storm and can't see the way out try crying out the hymn "Majesty" between the cracks of thunder and flashes of lightning. Do you know that one?:

"Majesty, worship His Majesty.
Unto Jesus, be all glory, power and praise
Majesty, Kingdom authority.

Flow from His throne, unto His own, His anthem raise.
So exalt, lift up on high the Name of Jesus
Magnify, come glorify, Christ Jesus the King
Majesty, worship His Majesty.
Jesus who died, now glorified, King of all kings."

Perhaps I like the storm too much. I am rarely in any hurry to get out of it. I seem to remember that the rainbow will rise and I know that when I see it, all I will think is that "It was worth it." But I know that the lesson I have yet to learn is that God is trying to show His power through the storm, not in it.

We are all a work in progress.

I didn't know the hymn "O Love That Will Not Let Me Go" but God pointed it out for us this week. I am glad for this opportunity to lift the words of this hymn up to God. A Thank-You, for all that He has promised and therefore done for me.

The first verse reminds me that everything I have is God's and in Him I can have so much more than I could ever ask for. He will never let me down or give up on me. O Love that will not let me go.

The second verse reminds me that I find my strength in Him and am renewed by His light and His Word, That I can burn brighter with Him. I yield my flickering torch to thee.

The third verse reminds me to look through the storm. The joy comes through the pain, I must search for the hope IN the storm and trust that the sunshine will come. I trace the rainbow through the rain.

The fourth verse reminds me that Christ found His glory by laying down his life and only then was he given life eternal. We must die with Christ in order to live with him. Fear not the pain, the darkness, nor try to fight them. Accept the journey that God has blessed me with, whatever that entails. I dare not ask to fly from thee.

O Love that will not let me go. In you I find rest, strength, leadership, hope, courage, and comfort.

Promises are about hope. That when things settle down and life plains out, something good will happen.

Signs are a reminder of a promise made. A reminder to cling to that hope.

The rainbow is a sign of the covenant God made with all living creatures. It was not a conditional covenant. He didn't say that "if you do this, that, and the other thing, then I'll..." It wasn't a promise just to a chosen few or even just to humans. It was an unconditional promise to all life that He will not write us off, wipe us out, and try again.

An end will come, but it will be the fulfillment of all promises, large and small, not an attempt at another mulligan.

This is the pot of gold: He's got you. He's got you in the palm of His hand. He will take care of every detail of your life. He will keep you safe, all you have to do is trust, look to Him, and keep your eyes searching for that rainbow when you lose sight of His promise amidst the storm. That is worth more than all gold.

It is a simple and beautiful reminder that He will not let you go.

Benediction:

'Just as I swore in the time of Noah that I would never again let a flood cover the earth, so now I swear that I will never again be angry and punish you. For the mountains may move and the hills disappear, but even then my faithful love for you will remain. My covenant of blessing will never be broken,' says the Lord who has mercy on you.

~ Isaiah 54:9-10

Soli Deo Gloria,
Rev. Rynn Parraw