

Sermon for March 30th, 2014

Fourth Sunday in Lent, Matthew 26:30-35, 69-75

BLESSINGS TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD THE FATHER, OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

This is the **fourth** week of the preaching series “Restored in Christ”. Over the last 3 weeks we have heard about *broken vessels*, *broken trust*, and *broken bread*. Today we will be hearing about *broken promises*.

Have you ever been **disappointed** by life? Have you ever had faith or belief in someone **only** to have that faith or belief **shattered**? How did it feel? *Broken promises* or oaths unfulfilled can break down the **strongest** of relationships. Our human nature can bring us to that place where our expectations, perceived or otherwise, may **not** always pan out like we had hoped. Words might be said that can never be taken back, hopes and dreams dashed-gone forever, trusts betrayed, or maybe someone you **always** thought you could count on to be there for you-just wasn't. *Broken promises* can be **painful** to experience because the foundation and basis of a relationship, a relationship we may have trusted in and depended upon, is now **gone** or at best **needs to be rebuilt**. *What now?*

The other night in **Confirmation** the students and I were talking about what it means to live a life of integrity. How people of integrity are honest, trustworthy in character, and live their lives in a way that other people would like to emulate.

Living with integrity means **our words and actions match**. Two sayings we may have heard of are, “*Actions speak louder than words.*” And “*A person is only as good as their word.*” Very **true** statements when it comes to speaking of integrity.

In seminary, in ethics class, we read this book, “*Where in the world is integrity? The challenge of doing what is right.*” Because quite frankly folks, sometimes living a life of integrity is not always easy. (Read p. ix of the book) In this world of *broken promises* **where** does our Christian life fit in?

In our **first** reading for this morning it was rather clear that David, the writer of the psalm, knew pretty well who was able to abide in **God’s** tent and dwell on His **holy hill**. It was the person who walked blamelessly, did what is right, spoke the truth from their heart, did not slander others, did not do evil to their friends, did not go against their neighbors, honored those who feared the Lord, stood by their oaths, did not take advantage of others by lending money for interest (which was strictly against Jewish law), and those who did not take a bribe against the innocent. The psalmist concludes, “*Those who do these things shall never be moved.*” In my mind, that is a **pretty impressive list** of ways to live in these days for sure where greed, materialism, and being number one are highly valued.

For the apostle Paul living a life of integrity was **not** easy. Because of his **preaching** of the Good News of Jesus Christ he was imprisoned more than one time in his life. In this letter to Timothy he tells Timothy that he is to **remember**

who Jesus Christ is, even as he (Paul) is chained like a criminal for the sake of the gospel—the Word of God is not chained **nor** is it burdened. He (Paul) endures **everything** for the sake of the elect who **serve** Jesus with confidence and even if they fall away in faithlessness Jesus will **remain faithful** to them **and** us as God’s **generous faithfulness** will keep God from denying those of us who falter.

Those who falter are **no more evident** than in our gospel reading for this morning. Jesus and the disciples had gone to the Mt. of Olives where Jesus foretold of the disciple’s desertion because of Him, he quotes Zechariah 13: 7 where it says, “*I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.*”, and He predicted Peter’s denial of him.

You may have noticed a gap in our gospel verses. In that gap Jesus went to **Gethsemane** to pray, the disciples **fell asleep** while keeping watch—3 times no less, Jesus was **arrested** and brought before the Sanhedrin, then we come to where Peter was sitting outside in the **courtyard** at the high priest’s palace. This is where Peter’s words to Jesus became meaningless. **Three** times he denied even knowing Jesus, **twice** he swore an oath—he gave his **WORD**—that he did not know Jesus, then **cock** crowed. When the time came for Peter to **stand up** and declare his **allegiance** to Jesus, he faltered and he failed. Peter’s *broken promises* were **exposed** and he went out and **wept** bitterly.

Peter teaches us **all** a lesson. Peter shows us what it looks like to break a promise. But WHO of us have **not** seen ourselves in Peter at one time or another—the one who adamantly pledged his faithfulness to **not** desert the Lord, the one whose promises are broken? WHO of us have **not** denied God or Jesus at one time or another—do we **stand up** for our faith in the face of opposition or ridicule? Peter was just a bit more vocal than the other disciples about his **denial** of deserting Jesus, of his **ultimate** betrayal of Jesus, and of his *broken promises* as well. Peter gave his **WORD**—but when all was said and done, his word turned out to be **meaningless**. Any integrity Peter had was lost.

Broken promises or oaths unfulfilled can break down the **strongest** of relationships. In spite of all this, **here** is something for us to focus on. The Good News if you will. Did you notice that after Jesus had initially told **all** the disciples that they would become deserters **because of Him** he would go ahead of them to Galilee after he was raised? **God's grace and forgiveness for human frailties abounds!!!** Even though Jesus knew these men would **desert** him, **deny** him, and leave him **alone** in his time of need, He would **be with them** in the end. There is God's grace in action. The men that Jesus had **hand chosen**—one of them betrays him for **30** pieces of silver—the one who ultimately **hangs himself** because of it, one promises to **NEVER** desert him, and the other 10 do **not say a word** they just slink off into the night not to be heard from. Yet, **Jesus forgives**. Jesus will be

with them ultimately. Jesus **knows** their humanness and flaws. In time, Jesus will **restore** Peter and the other 10 to their places. Grace, mercy, forgiveness, and love **win out** even in the face of desertion, betrayal, and denial. We, too, are flawed and broken people but God promises us redemption through the **cross** of Jesus Christ.

Once again, this story is **all** about God. It is about God working in the lives of the disciples, it is about God working in our lives as well. We are all “*Restored in Christ*” in spite of *broken promises*. All thanks be to God. **AMEN**