

First Presbyterian Church
Cheyenne, Wyoming
July 19, 2009
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Worship Theme: A Promise with Results

2 Samuel 7:1–14a, Ephesians 2:11–22, Mark 6:30–34, 53–56

Have you made any promises lately, to yourself or to others? How are you doing on these promises? I struggle to fulfill all the promises I make, especially to myself. What exactly is a promise? A promise is defined in one place as “an expressed assurance on which an expectation is to be based.” So when we make a promise to ourselves, God or others that we will do something, it is expected we will do it. I wonder what the success rate has been on promises made by human beings throughout history? Even an Emmy award winning romantic musical was written about promises. It was titled, “Promises, Promises.” In this play, promises made in the work place and promises given in relationships collapsed all over the place. This musical raised the question we might all be asking, “Can any promises be taken seriously or be the basis of any expectations?” What promises have you made lately?

Promises God has made can be taken seriously, because they bring results. Today’s scripture lessons speak of God’s promises—promises that have been fulfilled and have actually exceeded expectations. 3,000 years ago a promise was made by Yahweh about a Messiah. This promise began with some conversations among Yahweh, a prophet named Nathan, and King David of Judah and Israel. King David had conquered the local tribes so he could establish Jerusalem as the political and religious capital of his kingdom. When the wars were over, he would lounge around his house lined with cedar wood in Jerusalem. Only the wealthy and powerful had cedar wood lined houses at that time. It came to King David that it did not seem right for him to live in such a luxurious house when the Ark of the Covenant, which represented the presence of God, was kept in a simple tent. So King David consulted with the prophet, Nathan, about building a real nice house of worship for God. Nathan told David, “Hey, you are the king, do whatever your heart desires, for God is with you.”

It was to David’s benefit that God was with him for Yahweh happened to overhear this conversation, and told the prophet Nathan what to tell David. Here is an expanded version of God’s message to David. “David, about that house, you have a nice idea in mind, but you have jumped the gun on the process. You are not the one I had in mind to build me a house. The fact is, I have not asked for a house and do not need a house. I cannot be tied down, owned by anyone or kept in a place. I am not a God of place, David, but the God of living grace. To illustrate what I mean by this, David, I will remind you, David, of what my living grace has done for you in the past. ‘I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people, Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you.’ In the future, David, this is what my living grace will do for you. I promise, ‘I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their

own place, and be disturbed no more.’ Moreover, I promise to you that I will make you a house, that is a living dynasty. ‘Your house’—your living dynasty, ‘and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.’ David, I am not a God of place, but the God of living grace.”

Yahweh took David’s idea of what a house was and by living grace turned it into a promised dynasty, a kingdom, a lineage, or an ancestry that will last forever in God’s eyes. Yahweh took the idea of a place and turned it into an everlasting relationship of grace with him. All that Yahweh said here led to the Jewish expectation of a promised Messiah, a Savior King, who would be anointed and appointed by God, to fulfill God’s promises of living grace to David of an everlasting kingdom and relationship to God. This scripture passage is the source of the promise and expectation of a Messiah the Jews have had for 3,000 years. [TNIBC](#), Vol.II, pg. 1254.

A thousand years after this promise was made, God fulfilled it. God came in Jesus the Christ or the Messiah. As we heard in Mark, the dynasty of David continued in the one Christians call “King” or “Lord” of their lives. As I said before, the results of God’s promise of a dynasty exceeded expectations because this King, this Jesus did not rule from a cedar wood palace or temple, but by “an everlasting relationship of grace with him.” In the Gospel lesson we see a portion of the results of God’s fulfilled promise of a dynasty or “the everlasting relationship of grace with him.” Instead of building an army of 30,000 men as King David did, Jesus gathered only twelve ragtag men around him. Instead of going about conquering tribes by war as King David did with his many men, Jesus was leading his few followers on the conquest of the causes and results of wars. By God’s grace, his unconditional and everlasting love, Jesus was out to overcome the powers of sin, sickness, idolatry, greed, nation worship, religious intolerance, sexism—whatever divided people from each other and God, and the resultant kingdom of death these evil powers caused. He fought all these evils as we heard in Mark by peacefully going about the same countryside David conquered by war. Jesus weapons were his teachings about God’s Kingdom; about God’s grace or his unconditional and everlasting love. He fought the battle by feeding the hungry, healing the sick, befriending the friendless, and showering great compassion upon the crowds who “were like sheep without a shepherd.” Jesus did this even when he was exhausted. He was wise enough to try to get some rest, but the people were so hungry for what he offered that they would not let alone. In a sense Jesus had conquered these people by meeting their needs and helping them to overcome the evil enemies in their lives by God’s grace or his unconditional love. He was leading them into the dynasty God promised David—that is the Kingdom of God which exceeded the expectations of the promise God made 1000 years before.

People today are still this hungry for what Jesus promises. Rev. R. Craig MacCreary writes: “In over 100 years of intense missionary activity prior to 1949, the number of Protestant converts in China never exceeded 700,000. After the Communist persecution began, Chinese Christianity began to grow. The number of Christians now exceeds fifteen million — still a small percentage of China’s billions, but an astounding increase, all the same. It is thought there are vastly greater numbers of Chinese Christians meeting in undocumented house churches.”

“At a missionary conference in 2006 in the United States, a Chinese woman, Li Enlin, told of how her father, a pastor, sometimes has to climb over the heads of the worshipers in his church — so tightly packed into the sanctuary are they, with “standing-room only” outside. She told also of going to speak herself at a “meeting point” — what we in the West know as a “house church.” What Li found when she got to this remote mountain village was not a church, nor even a building at all, but 2,000 people gathered in an open field. She spoke for an hour — and then they would not let her stop, for they wanted more.” “Emphasis,” July/August, 2006

Is this same hunger not why so we are here today to worship Jesus the Messiah as our King? We know by experience that he has looked upon us with compassion and grace. He has come beside us to feed us, to heal us, to teach us God’s ways, to comfort and shepherd us in our lives. He had made us members of his dynasty of everlasting life. We come in thanksgiving for what he has done and we come seeking more from him because we can trust in the promises God made through him.

We also know from the Epistle Lesson, that Jesus paid dearly to fulfill God’s promises. Though he did not raise an army to conquer others by war, he still fought a war with the powers of sin, evil, and whatever divided people from each other and God, and the resultant kingdom of death they caused. Instead of asking thousands to die in the battle, he shed his own blood on our behalf. It was only by his blood, shed in agony on the cross, that sin and everlasting death could be conquered. It was those powers with whom he fought the battle that nailed him to the cross. It was the same God who exceeded the expected results of his promise of a dynasty of “an everlasting relationship of grace with him” made to David by raising Jesus from the dead. It was by the shedding of his blood and the resurrection by God that the powers of sin, evil, and whatever divided people from each other and God, and the resultant kingdom of death they caused, were conquered. Jesus paid dearly to fulfill God’s promises.

Unfortunately, in the first century church this “everlasting relationship of grace” and Jesus’ costly blood sacrifice to eliminate divisions was being forgotten. Jews and Gentiles in the early church created new divisions by fighting over whether or not new male Christians must be circumcised to have salvation. It created social and religious divides. We still have the same forgetfulness and division today among the Universal Christian Church. We often forget that we are a part of God’s dynasty created by God’s promise, sealed by Christ’s blood and saved alone by God’s grace. Most divisions then and now are pure nonsense, for we are all saved alone by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. Paul reminded them and reminds us: “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and that he might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.” By what Jesus did in exceeding the expectations of God’s promise, all who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are one church. “In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for

God.” Even today, the great structures like this one are not really the Church or the houses of worship. The Church or the house of the worship of God is God’s Holy Spirit and Christ’s presence in you and me. Just as God told King David he reminds us, I am not a God of place, but the God of living grace. We are the church by “an everlasting relationship of grace with him.” All Christians as one are the result of God’s promise to David that has exceeded expectations through the costly blood of Jesus Christ.

Instead of spending the time, money and resources fighting one another God in Jesus Christ wants us to work with him as his partners to continue the dynasty of an everlasting relationship of grace with him begun in King David, fulfilled in Jesus Christ and now passed on to you and me. Jesus Christ wants us to fulfill the promises we take in the vows of faith we make in joining the Presbyterian Church: “God in Jesus Christ wants us to trust in the gracious mercy of God, turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world: Turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as our Lord and Savior, trusting in his grace and love: Be Christ's faithful disciples by obeying his Word and showing his love: And be a faithful member of this congregation or any Christian congregation, share in its worship and ministry through our prayers and gifts, our study and service, and so fulfill our calling to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.” There are hundreds of children, youth and adults in this community, along with billions of Chinese and other peoples that need to hear God’s promised everlasting relationship of grace with him in Jesus Christ: That need us to feed them and heal them: That need us to teach them God’s ways, to comfort them and shepherd them. God will provide the results that exceed expectations, but God needs us to work as one body in Christ to do it. Will we fulfill our promises made in church membership to do just this? I hope and pray so.