Promises Fulfilled

* Thanks to Pastor Amy for this opportunity
* Shout out to Jack Hott, for this was to be his time here
* It is quite good that I am not up here very frequently now
  + We have Jack, Jenn, Pastor Doug, and we had Kirby
  + And I get to preach quite a bit – something like 60 times since beginning of 2016
* I’ve commented many times of differences between preaching here and in other churches
  + They haven’t heard all my jokes
  + They treat me with respect because they think I know what I’m doing
    - Y’all know better than that
  + In other churches, I come in, they fetch coffee for me and ask me to chill
  + Here – set up for worship, bulletins, doors, computer, sound system….
* Anyway, I am glad to be right here today
* My brother Jeff is preaching right now at Christ UMC in Salisbury MD
* He’s talking a bit about me today in his message. If he were here, he could talk about me, for he knows all the dirt
* I am really proud of the work he is doing and I look forward to the national men’s conference he is organizing.
  + I will attend this event in February in Salisbury
  + Let me know if you’d like to attend this conference, for I’d love to have travel companions for the trip
* Pastor Amy asked for this scripture passage for today
* It is from the Lectionary for last year, or 2 years from now, or as it turns out, 4 years ago
* For I used this very scripture passage here in 2014, on the Sunday following Christmas.
* My focus that day was the faithfulness of Anna and Simeon, and I took a look at some the saints who have worshipped here over the years
  + The faithfulness that was obvious in the lives of Simeon and Anna as they anticipated and longed for the arrival of the messiah
  + those the saints who have worshipped and served here over the years
  + I named names 4 years ago – a risk in that I could have and probably did leave out your own loved ones
    - Bob and Kathryn Perks, Leonard and Mildred Gibson, Marge and Dick Wade, June and Lynn Eaton.
  + But I listed a couple of my dear favorites
    - Of these, I spoke a bit about Marge and Dick
  + We can all name the names of the saints who demonstrated faithfulness here
  + And no doubt, if I were to list saints today, the list would be longer than in 2014.
* But, not gonna do that for today we are looking at Promises Fulfilled
* As a result, this message was written for today, and today’s theme.
* And if I’m asked to preach somewhere on Sunday after Christmas in 2020, when this scripture pops up in Lectionary again,
  + I will have 2 sermons prepared
* Simeon and Anna
* How cool it would be to be the tool that God chose to use to fulfill a promise
* One of my favorite music selections, features music written by Englishman Sir John Rutter, and words attributed to St Francis of Assisi
  + Lord, Make an Instrument of Thy Peace
* When I toured with men’s ensemble Exaltation, which I did from 1991 to 2011, we attempted to sing this selection
  + We sang here once each summer during that time
  + Beautiful and very difficult harmony from the pen of John Rutter
  + And the striking words attributed to St. Francis
* St Francis asks God in prayer, that he might be an instrument of God’s peace
  + More interested in loving others than being loved
  + More interested in pardoning others than being pardoned
  + More interested in consoling others that being consoled
  + More interested in understanding others than being understood
  + Then St Francis expressed
    - Where there is hatred, let me bring love
    - Where this is doubt, let me bring faith
    - Where there is Darkness, let me bring light
    - For it is giving that we receive
    - It is pardoning that we are pardoned
    - And this striking final phrase
    - And it is Dying that we are born to eternal life
* To be used by God, as fulfillment of God’s promises, would be an honor
* If we are open to listen for the call, there is no doubt that God would each use us to fulfill a promise
* That certainly was the case with Anna and Simeon
* Happened to me, at least once
* There is a connection to the Bible and being God’s tool
* I have been privileged to be a conduit for God’s scripture in Hope House in Middletown
* Through my connection to The Gathering, I am privileged to lead a weekly class at Hope House, for the men
  + Still not allowed in the Women’s shelter
  + If there is a woman who wants a similar experience with the women of Middletown, please yell at me and I think we can make that happen
* The men, women and children, and yes there are homeless children in Middletown, attend church services led by Dr Mitchell Foster, the director of Hope House.
  + He of course, brings the Word to the men and women
  + The HH residents are bussed to Dr Foster’s church on Lafayette Ave in Middletown for worship
* As guys in HH demonstrate trustworthiness, they are allowed to make their own worship decision
  + So I have seen several of the guys in worship at The Gathering, which is located just a couple city blocks east of Hope House
* In my weekly session there, I discovered that many want a personal coy of the Bible and don’t have one
  + So I started providing them
  + I have handed out 49 brand new Bibles to men of HH
  + If I was allowed in the women’s shelter, I’m sure an equal number would go there
  + I now jokingly say my middle name is Gideon
  + I am privileged to bring the copies of the Bible to these men at Hope House
* Now, how many of you remember the Broadway musical Promises Promises?
  + Based on Billy Wilder movie “The Apartment”
  + Stage book written by Neil Simon, music by Burt Bacharach and Hal David
  + Anyway, play revolves around a young woman, Fran Kubelik and men who, under the guise of romance, fill her with lies
    - She sings of promises promises
    - Then after she tried to kill herself, sings “I’ll never fall in love again”
    - But male lead, C.C. Baxter, saves her and gives her hope
    - But overriding theme is the litany of broken promises made to Fran
* Promises
* I fear that most of us have suffered from unkept promises
* No doubt, I have made promises which I did not keep
* In my poking around, I found The Promise United Methodist Church
  + Such a cool name for a church
  + Fishers, Indiana, northeast Indianapolis suburb
  + Worship time is 10:29
    - When they publish worship time as 10:29, gotta believe they can keep a promise
* And of course, they speak of the promises of God
* What does God promise?
  + Life of no pain?
  + Our every wish will be satisfied
  + “fairness”
* No, no such promises
* But God promises to be with us when we face hardship
* Among the promises of God:
* **Jeremiah 29:11**
  + For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.
* **Matthew 11:28-29**
  + “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*
* **Romans 8:37-39**
  + No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.
* Many other scripture references to God’s promises
  + How many can you find this week?
* I use all three of these scriptures when I am with the guys at Hope House during our weekly sessions
  + Don’t promise then instant wealth
  + but do promise that God loves each guy
* Pastor Amy, in her Christmas Eve sermon, spoke of just some of the people that God used to fulfill promises
* Remember the first big promise in the Old Testament, made to Abraham about the Hebrew nation – his family
  + Genesis 22:17
    - I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies
  + Continuing Exodus 6:2-8, Moses steps in to help fulfill promise to Abraham, generations AFTER death of Abraham
  + So God made the huge promise to Abraham, then Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Joshua all had a hand in bringing this promise to life
  + God promised the covenant with Abraham and Abraham’s people
    - You be my people and I will be your God
    - Pretty simple promise
* Pastor Amy spoke of the apparent unlikeliness of some of the folks who brought promises to life
  + Samuel anointed David to be king of Israel, even though he was far from king of his own family
    - He was the youngest and smallest of Jesse’s seven sons
    - Yet God, looking beyond the physical traits, chose David to be king, and help keep the covenant with Abraham alive
* But as God’s people demonstrated that they could not keep their part of the covenant
  + YOU BE MY PEOPLE
  + Old testament is filled with stories of God’s people NOT acting like they wanted God
  + Time after time, God called us to be God’s people
    - Time after time, the people said no
  + God saw that a new plan was needed
  + The Prophet Isaiah heard of this plan
  + And revealed the new plan, the new covenant in Isaiah 9: 6
  + **For to us a child is born,  
        to us a son is given,  
        and the government will be on his shoulders.  
    And he will be called  
        Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
        Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**
* We celebrated this birth just this week, as we gathered here on Monday night, Christmas Eve
* We celebrated the birth of the Christ child, to simple, unwed, and at the time of Jesus’ birth, far-from-home, parents
  + Jesus not born in a palace or castle
  + But in a barn
* Do you think that Joseph and Mary, say 12 months earlier had any idea that they would play such a vital role in God’s promise to us?
* When the Angel told Mary what was to happen, we see her response in Luke 1
  + **I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.”**
* For the people of God, this birth signaled a new promise
* Jesus, through his life, death and resurrection, brought to life, the new covenant from God
  + The new promise from God
* Then Jesus needed to form a team to work with him and to take on leadership after he ascended into heaven
* So he recruited
* He didn’t look in palaces or even the Jerusalem Temple for his leadership trainees
* He went to the Sea of Galilee
* He recruited simple fisherman Simon, later nicknamed Peter the Rock
  + and he recruited others from the sea, James, John, Andrew – all fisherman
  + all of these simple and untrained guys became leaders of the church
  + simple guys
* Jesus promised the guys that the Holy Spirit would arrive and guide and support them
* Sure enough, the followers of Jesus were gathered on Pentecost, shortly after Jesus ascended into heaven
* And the Holy Spirit came and empowered these simple fisherman to become great leaders
  + Just as Jesus promised
* These fishermen were next in line of simple people to step up, by strengthened by God
  + And lived and worked to keep God’s promises to us alive
* So who followed?
  + Martin Luther, John Wesley, Bishop Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury are prominent leaders who helped the Methodist church flourish in England and here
* Like last time, we can list the laypeople who have lived and served here
* And we can list clergy leaders
  + In my time here, that includes United Methodist elders: Melvin Alkire, Lowell Scheufler, Gary Hughes, Ron Christly, Jim Sands, Mark Shimer, Suzanne Allen, Amy Haines
* Each of these men and women were appointed here to serve God, to serve us, and to keep God’s promises alive,
  + To fulfill God’s promises
* So after the people from the Bible, leaders from church history, laypeople who have served here, clergy who have served here
  + Who is next to serve?
  + Who is next to help keep God’s promises alive?
  + Who is next to help God fulfill promises?
* Which of us will lead?
* What are we called to do?
  + Come to church and sit for an hour?
  + Sit on a committee
* What are we to fulfill?
* How are we to live into God’s promises?
* What can I do?
  + Who am I?
  + You, are a beloved child of God, thus gifted
* What can I do?
  + Give generously to local church
  + Give generously to missions of the bigger church
    - UMCOR, UM Advance, Light the Way campaign to start and grow local churches
  + Teach Sunday School
  + Serve at SCAC site, like food pantry
  + Serve WiF projects
  + Serve UMM projects
  + Look into ministries that occur outside of this building
    - Many of our people have such projects going on. Speak to one of these people
  + Speak with Pastor Amy
  + Or with Pastor Doug
  + Or with Kim Crosen
  + Or with one of our 2 CLM’s
    - Jenn Fry
    - Or myself
  + Each of us can point to ways in which we can be involved
* You can be an agent of God’s promises
* You can be next in line with this wonderful list of saints who have served God and the people in fulfilling God’s promises
* You can be next

**Promises of God**

**FUMC**

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