May 29, 11 Memorial day Genesis 9:12-17

# THE PROMISE LIVES ON

"If elected I promise a car in every garage and a chicken in every pot." President Hebert Hover promised that while running for office in 1928. "I promise" are words many politicians use when trying to get elected. Many promise the things voters want to hear, but we all know they can't always keep those promises. In court procedures if you are a witness you raise your hand and promise "to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God." I wish those on Judge Judy would learn what that means before they raise their hands and take that oath. Maybe then there wouldn't be so many stupid things on her program, though I think they do it for their fleeting moment of fame while embarrassing themselves and their family.

When a child gets caught in a lie, or has done something wrong they often promise never to do that again. But we know they will be asking forgiveness again for lying again, or misbehaving. Even we older folk know that we have promised things to God and we have meant it, but sometimes we break those promises. But we know God is there to forgive us because he is full of more grace than we will ever know.

And since this is Memorial Day and we are remembering those who have fought and died for our country, and those who served in peacetime holding the peace. We remember that at one time they had to raise their right hand and promise to defend this country even while it might cost them their lives. Every president, every member of congress, every politician when elected and ready to take office places their hand on a Bible and promise to 'defend the laws of the land.' I remember the time that at age 18 I raised my right hand when I joined the Navy in April of 1954, and promised to defend this country with my life. Many veterans here today perhaps remember doing that as well. At this Annual Conference there will be new pastors being ordained who will promise to lead their congregation, and take care of the needs of their flock, preach

God's Word, visit the sick, and a variety of other things we pastor's do. In that case the words that bind that oath are, "with God's help I promise to faithfully do what God has ordained me to do."

What a great thought, 'with God's help'. The other day at my granddaughters final soccer match there was man who had a T shirt that said 'nothing is impossible for those who have determination.' I thought that was a great slogan. But I also would have added 'with God's help, and ones determination, nothing is impossible.'

While thinking about Memorial Day and those who are graduating these days and of course those who are getting married who also promise many things, and with the mighty storms that have hit our area, and watching a TV news station talking about the tornado that hit Joplin and destroyed much of the city, as well as other tornadoes that caused destruction a sermon thought came to me. You see, following the storms and all the destruction, someone took a picture of a double rainbow in the sky. It might not have meant much to some but I wonder if some Christians saw that as a sign from God that threw the storms and through the clean up and through the patching up of their lives, God is with them. And that brought me to the thought for this sermon. Though our focus the last few weeks has been on Easter and the resurrection when you put it all in perspective it really is about all the promises of God. With that on my mind I thought of 3 promises of God that are important for all of Christianity and the whole world, promises we can put in the bank and count on.

The first one comes from Genesis 9 following the great flood. After destroying the world except for Noah and his family, when the Ark landed at its appointed place and the flood waters were finally gone and a new earth was formed and Noah and his family were able to come out of the ark God made a promise to Noah and to the world. Hear God's word from Genesis 9:12-17:

*God continued, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and everything living around you and everyone living after you. [13]* ***I'm putting my rainbow in the clouds, a sign of the covenant between me and the Earth****. [14] From now on, when I form a cloud over the Earth and the rainbow appears in the cloud, [15] I'll remember my covenant between me and you and everything living, that never again will floodwaters destroy all life. [16] When the rainbow appears in the cloud, I'll see it and remember the eternal covenant between God and everything living, every last living creature on Earth."*

*[17] And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I've set up between me and everything living on the Earth."*

That first promise of God is that he will never destroy the earth again by flooding it. Now at times he might turn on the faucets full blast and flood many places so we think, but somehow, some way, when a rainbow appears he will remember his promise to his people and tell those in charge of the down-pouring rain TURN IT OFF!!! So when you see that rainbow, as those in Joplin saw that day after the tornado and rain, it is a reminder to God to turn off the faucets in heaven. His promise to Joplin and others, he gave them a double rainbow...I haven't forgotten you.

God has promised elsewhere that if the people of this world would humble themselves, confess their sins, repent, change their ways, pray, he would heal our land. That's another great promise of God that still exists today.

Another promise that came to my mind while thinking about God's promises is found in the closing passages of the Gospel of Matthew where it states

*Jesus…gave his charge: "God authorized and commanded me to commission you: [19] Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. [20] Then instruct*

*them in the practice of all I have commanded you.* ***I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age."***

Did you catch God's promise? **HE WILL BE WITH US ALWAYS.** That's a wonderful promise. God never, ever leaves our side. He never walks away. We often think of him as the hound of heaven that pursues his lost child. In fact that is the picture we find of him in Luke talking about lost things. First when the shepherd counts his flock and sees only 99 and he should have 100, he leaves the 99 and goes looking for the one. We know the Shepherd is Jesus and the one is any lost soul that has strayed away from the Shepherds care which of course could be any of us. His promise no matter what, he will be with us always. God never walks away. If there is ever a problem between God and us, God remains, we tend to walk away. His promise, 'I'll be with you.'

That is the assurance that Jesus gave his disciples that day when he commissioned them to go into the entire world and tell his story. He told them before times would get tough but he would be with them always. He never would abandon them or us. He may never like the road that we take, but he will always be there to guide us back to the right one. I think Carrie Underwood's song, "Jesus Take the Wheel" reminds me of that promise. Though this girl had made some wrong decisions and like the Prodigal son was heading home one Christmas night with her little baby in the backseat, no money, no one seemed to love her, and it was pretty snowy. Her thoughts weren't on God that night, but hoping, just hoping her parents would welcome her home and give her and her baby a place to stay and help them through whatever ordeal she was going through. Then it happened. She hit a slick ice spot and the car began to go out of control perhaps taking her from one side of the road to the other. She was fighting the elements, fighting the slide as her life flashed before her. It was then that she remembered the man named Jesus whose birth she was going home to celebrate, and his promise never to leave or

forsake anyone. In the song it was then that she cried out for Jesus to take the wheel of her car and at just the right moment, it must have felt like someone had placed their hands on her hands on the steering wheel and guided her car to rest on the side of the road very gently. It was so gentle her sleeping baby in the backseat never did wake up. When she got settled down she cried out again for Jesus to take the wheel, but not of her car but of her live. Wonderful song, wonderful thought. A wonderful God who promises to be with us always, even when we make the wrong choices. He is just a turnaround away.

The final promise comes from God's promise found in John 3:16. John 3:16

*"This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed;* ***by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life****.*

By believing in Jesus, anyone, yes anyone can have a whole and everlasting life. That's the promise of Easter. "Up from the grave he arose with a mighty triumph over his foes. He arose a victor from the dark domain and lives forever with his saints to reign." It's God promise that this life is not the end but there is one that is coming that will allow us to spend eternity with God and others who have believed in his name. Jesus promised his disciples on the night he was betrayed that one day he would come back for them and take them home to their new home in heaven. That promise made then to them, is the promise that today we bank our faith on. Our salvation is not earned, but given to us by just believing in the son of God and in the promises of our God.

Memorial Day came into being because then President Lincoln was saddened by the fact that so many soldiers from the North and the South had died to support their causes. The bloodshed was so great that he gave his great speech at Gettysburg and then later proclaimed a day of remembrance where all soldiers who died would be remembered. Through the years it wasn't just the Civil War soldiers that were

remembered, but as our country has fought different wars we remember on this day the fallen heroes that gave their lives for the cause of freedom supported by this country. And through the years it also came to be another day we honor all veterans who have served to protect our rights and the rights for other countries we are called on to assist. And then I don't know have many years ago, it became a day to remember all people who have died. I remember going with my parents to place wreaths on my grandparents graves, my aunts and uncles graves as well. When we look at Camp Butler this weekend you will see an American flag flying from each grave. And in many other cemeteries flags will be flown on the graves of our fallen heroes. Today we have already mentioned some of them, some who were veterans, some who were our friends, family and neighbors that we have lost this year and in years past.

Three great promises, when I see a rainbow in the sky I will remember you, I'll always be with you, and I have a place for you in eternity.

In a recent article in the newspaper states: "What happened to Memorial Day? Once known as Decoration Day. It was a day to remember our fallen heroes of all wars. Today, it's a never-ending long weekend of anything but remembering." He lists some events being held and then says, "Declaration day, as it was first termed, was started in 1868 by Major General John A. Logan to honor the graves of the Union soldiers. Over 640,000 men died in the Civil War. The day was set as May 30 later changed to the last Monday of May." (Like other holidays it makes for a long weekend rather than celebrating on the day it was intended,) "After WW I the American Legion founded in May of 1919 took over the Memorial Day observances. Today Memorial Day has been evolved into a long weekend of having fun. Our war dead, those who protected and saved this country for us, a decided after-thought. In South County the tradition of honoring our fallen heroes continues today and will only as long as the WW II veterans survive. But that time may be fast coming to an end because Veterans Affairs

Department says that more than 1,200 WW II vets are dying each day. When young people equate Memorial Day to just another holiday one that gets less attention than Marin Luther King, Earth Day, Casmir Pulaski Day etc we have to question our values." He goes on to list towns where the fallen heroes are being honored, including Williamsville. He concludes, "These towns are lucky that there are people who still remember, who will take the time, less than an hour, to honor those who allow us to be free and in many cases to do what we want even when it means forgetting our fallen heroes, which is truly a shame. Freedom isn't free. Ignoring their sacrifice is a crime in itself."

I am so glad we here in Williamsville continue to remember our fallen heroes and I appreciate the opportunity today to offer the prayer at our celebration at 11:45 at our memorial honoring all service men who have served this country from this community.

Like December 7 and September 11th, we should never forget those who promised to defend our rights even if we disagree and are against what our country states.

For those before, and those today that promise of eternal life to those who believe is still one of the greatest promises that God has given us.

In a few moments we will be standing to sing our closing hymn "Standing on the Promises" and through that hymn we are reminded of the promises of our wonderful God in each verse.

Verse one we are reminded of the promises that Jesus is King. The second verse reminds us God's promises cannot fail. The third verse comes back to remind us of Christ the Lord and how we are bound to him because of his love for us. The final verse reminds us that because of God's promises through Jesus Christ our savior we cannot fall because we are resting in our Savior as the one who has died to make us free.

On this Memorial Day, as we reflect upon the lives of those who are no longer with us, let us take heart in knowing that because of God's promises we one day will be joined together and will spend eternity together with family, friends, and most importantly God, His Son Jesus, and the might Holy Spirit.

Praise God for his mighty promises that today we can count on right into eternity…..standing on promises of Christ our king….Let us stand and sing with gusto our thanks for those mighty promises that help shape, transform and sustain our lives on this earth. Amen