

SERMON
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Promises to God

December 31, 2017

Jeremiah 31:31-34 (Good News Translation)

Have you ever made a promise to someone? (raise your hand)
What about making a promise to yourself – like not eating chocolate, or giving up coffee, or working out every day – whose made that kind of promise?
And who has broken that promise?

Look around. You can see that you are not alone. All of us have made promises and almost all of us have broken promises. So why is that?

I know that I promised myself that I would take a walk early every morning. I know that it makes me feel good, it's a great way to start the day, and it gives me time to reflect and be with God.

BUT – when the weather gets a little colder, or the mornings are darker, well then it is easier for me to just snuggle down in the covers and have an extra half hour in bed. Sometimes I am just not strong enough to keep my promise. I give into the temptation of the warm covers.

Perhaps that's the same for many of you – you want to keep the promise, but the smell of fresh baking smells so good – it's too tempting. Or the plate of left over Christmas chocolates just have to be eaten up!

Or maybe you truly intended to spend a quiet time of devotion, just even a few minutes to talk to God, but your day just got too busy- and before you knew it you were at the end of the day and then you were too tired.

This fall some of the ladies of our church spent 5 weeks reading and studying a book called *Breathe* by Priscilla Scheere. She reminds us to take some Sabbath time, weekly or daily – some time to be just breathe, to let go of the baggage that ties us down and clutters our lives, and take time to just be with God.

But God knows it is hard for us. God knows that we are weak. In our scripture reading God reminds us that despite all that God did for the Israelites, they still did not keep their promise to keep God's laws. It says:

“Even when I took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt. Although I was like a husband to them, they did not keep that covenant.” (Jeremiah 31:32)

Promises can be hard to keep. Last night we had a wedding here at the church. The young bride and groom were very nervous as they made their promises to each other. It was a very exciting and happy ceremony. But the reality is, that 33% of marriages in Canada end in divorce because those promises that were made, are broken.

Promises can be hard to keep, even with the very best intentions. We are just human after all. But the good news is, God also makes promises with us. And God **is able** to keep those promises. In Jeremiah 31: 33-34 God makes a New Covenant with the people, with us, saying that:

“I will be their God, and they will be my people.” And “all will know me, from the least to the greatest. I will forgive their sins and I will no longer remember their wrongs.”

That, my friends, is Grace. God promises to love us as God’s people; to forgive us even when we are weak and break our promises; and to wipe the slate clean and not keep reminding us where we went wrong. Wow! That is love.

When you reflect on that kind of love. Doesn’t it just make you want to spend more time with the Divine.

Think about it for a minute – what might ‘Spending Time With God’ look like for you in your year ahead?

- Maybe you are being called to spend a time in quiet prayer once a day – perhaps before you go to bed, or when you first wake up;
- or perhaps you will try to connect with God outside, walking in nature;
- perhaps you are being called to be in fellowship with others in the community, meeting others and talking about what God is doing in your life;
- or maybe a time of mid week meditation, like our Wednesday Advent devotionals this year.

The children in our story, Timmy and Billy, they wrote promises that they knew would be hard to keep, but realistic promises that would show how much they loved their family. They were intentional promises.

What intentional promise will you make to God this new year?

A new year can bring all kinds of change. Remember, whether the days ahead are happy or sad, comfortable, or uncomfortable, joyous, or tragic, exciting, or challenging – all the days are held in God’s hands. God promises us that we are not alone. God promises us that we belong to God and the good news is, that God does not break a promise. Amen.

As we move into a quiet time of prayer, think about what promise you might want to make, maybe a promise to do something, or a promise to let go of something. A promise to God. There are slips of paper for you to write your promise on. We will pause after each segment of prayer; if the Spirit moves you, jot down your promise. At the end of the prayers, there will be an invitation to tie your promises to our own Christmas tree of promises.

Let us pray.

Call to Prayer: VU400 Lord Listen to Your Children Praying (repeated)

One: In this New Year

ALL: the worries and anxieties of the past will be accepted and let go

(silent reflection)

One: Thanks be to God. In this New Year,

ALL: the grudges and resentments we hold will be faced and overcome

(silent reflection)

One: Thanks be to God. In this New Year,

ALL: we will not just speak out for those downtrodden and despairing, we will work with them

(silent reflection)

One: Thanks be to God. In this New Year,

ALL: we will fulfill our calling as disciples of Jesus Christ, and the world, our neighbourhood, and our church will change for the better.

(silent reflection)

One: May this New Year change become a reality, and may our Promises to God be kept.