

Jeff's Jottings
March 13, 2020

Keeping Promises

“The remedy for the ... chaotic uncertainty of the future is contained in the faculty to make and keep promises,” wrote Hannah Arendt in her book, *The Human Condition*. These promises and commitments, she said, create “islands of security” within a wild sea of insecurities.

We stand today facing the most chaotic time in a generation or more: a isolating health crisis that will force us to disconnect with our environment amidst an already fractured society. An isolating health crisis that asks us to actively distrust contact with others; with gathering; with hands-on love and care, the practices that make us most human.

The ability to make and keep promises is our unique power to stand up against the whims of fate and circumstance. The truth is that none of us is ever more like Christ than when we simply make and simply keep commitments to each other—commitments rooted in Christ’s commitment to us, given through Paul, for times like the very ones we are experiencing now: of a peace that passes all understanding, guarding our hearts and minds.

There is much in this near term-future that is out of our hands—how we live, where we go. There is much we don’t know, and thus much we fear. What we know today could all change tomorrow. Where we have control, however small and insignificant it may seem, over the forces swirling around us, is this: to decide, once, twice, a thousand times over, that we will keep our caring commitments to people. That we will choose, in these chaotic times, to build on what God has promised us—a peace that passes all understanding—by following and creating the future God has put before us.

The particulars of our lives are all too often dictated by the “chaotic uncertainty of the future.” But the bedrock on which we build our lives? No coronavirus, no political upheaval, can alter that. Despite any circumstances, we can make commitments to listen, not just when words are spoken, but especially when they are not. To stay alert, always looking for the little things that have large meaning. To forgive, choosing the way of healing the wounds of unfair injury—ones we experience, and ones we cause. To stay honest, to speak truthfully and to listen for truth.

In this uncertain time, we can dare to make and care to keep commitments, sustained in the commitments God has made through us in Christ, to reach out in in these ways to each other. That is the promise and hope of the Gospel, the message of the church, the energy and possibility we need for these troubled times. And as your executive presbyter, it is my promise to you, to the best of my ability, in all that I do in this role.

Fear casts an awfully long shadow, one we see all around us today. We know another way, and there is no more important time for what we know than now—an extraordinary opportunity to live, not in fear, but with the hope and peace God has given us.