

A covenant is a promise.

In our lesson from Genesis we hear the story of God's covenant, God's promise, to Abram.

And in the story, we hear about what seems to be a strange and violent ritual to seal the covenant.

But it wasn't unusual back then.

In the ancient near east, covenants were formal treaties that bound two parties together. The covenant would state terms and conditions of the agreement as well as penalties in case the covenant was violated or neglected.

In our passage, we hear the specifics of this covenant-making process;

What is described here is called "cutting a covenant" which would seal the agreement.

here the cutting was literal as
An animal was actually cut in half,
to reinforce the importance for loyalty to the covenant.

As the fire passed through the divided animal
The message was
"may it be for you as it was for this animal if you don't keep the covenant"

It's a rather shocking image for us present day hearers,

But then I started thinking.

When I was a kid, we had our own little rituals around promises,

Now we didn't cut animals in half,
But we did use some graphic images...

In order to reinforce that we intended to keep our promises,
We would say;
"cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye"

It's the same thing, isn't it?

A reminder of the serious nature of making promises.
A reminder that broken promises have consequences.

But what about promises these days?

Does anyone really take them seriously anymore?
Or do we just expect that promises will be broken?

We certainly know that most of us have lost trust in our political leaders.

Most of us think that the term "campaign promises"
Is an oxymoron.

Bill Clinton said, "no wonder Americans hate politics, when year in, year out, they hear politicians make promises that won't come true because they don't even mean them"

Most of us expect political candidates to lie.

And what about in our personal relationships?

Even as I counsel with young couples who are planning to get married,
Too often there is an underlying approach
that “we’ll try this and see how it works out”

and then there’s business and advertising,

where we have just come to accept that “buyer beware” is our best weapon.

We pretty much expect that companies will do just about anything to make a buck,
And top execs will shamelessly take big bonuses while their companies go under.

And we’re not immuned, are we?

It’s not always the “other guy”

We all have broken promises at one time or another.

Sometimes we break promises to others

And sometimes we break promises to ourselves.

So what effect has all this promise-breaking had on us?

And are there any covenants in which we can trust?

This is where God comes in.

God is not like us.

God is always faithful and
God does not go back on promise.

In fact, **God cannot go back on promise.**

Because it would go against God’s character.

And

God’s character, unlike ours, is pure and undivided.

When God promises something “it is as good as done”

Even when it seems impossible.

God promised Abram and Sarai that they would have descendants as numerous as the stars.

But when the promise was given they were already very old.

Past child-bearing years,

Yet, because God promised it, it was so.

When God promises something, “it is as good as done”

Even when it seems to delay.

God made a covenant with the Israelites that they would be taken to the promised land.

But then they spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness.

Yet, because God promised it, it was so.

When God promises something, “it is as good as done”
Even when it seems that all is lost.

God made a new covenant in Jesus that all who believe in him will never die.
But then Jesus died on the cross.
Yet, because God promised it, it was so.

Today, five of our young people will receive their first communion.
and during the communion liturgy we will hear the words that
Jesus spoke to his disciples during their last meal together,
When he made them a promise.
When he made us a promise.

He said, “ This is the new covenant in my blood shed for you and for all people for
the forgiveness of sins.”

What’s the promise?
Every time we celebrate communion Jesus is present
Who is the promise for?
For all people
Why does he make the promise?
For the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus is God’s new covenant. Which goes one step farther than the old covenants.
This covenant is unconditional on God’s part.
Because it is no longer sealed by our loyalty.
Instead, it was sealed by Christ’s loyalty.

That’s the good news.
No matter how many time we mess up.
No matter how many times we break our promises to God and to one another,
God’s promise remains sure and certain.
We are loved and forgiven because God is true to God’s word.

And that’s what can restore our hope in promises.
That’ what can serve as our example for attempting to be true to our word.
That’s what can motivate us to live with integrity
That’s what can give us the courage to admit when we are wrong.

God’s promises are true.
When God promises something we can trust that “it’s as good as done”

Let us pray: Loving God, help us to trust that your promises are sure and your love is
never-ending. As we live into these promises, help us to be faithful to our word and
faithful to our commitments. Amen

