

“Safety”
 Psalm 27:1-6; Philippians 3:17-21; Luke 13:31-35
 Rev. David Hutchinson
 Sunday, March 17, 2019

Has anyone ever promised you so much - - you just - - could NOT believe it?

For example:

I'll NEVER be late again!

This will make you look TEN years younger!

I'll lasso the moon! OR...

I promise you a Rose Garden!

In my experience, big promises can be a COVER UP for guilt - - or mistakes.

Or a way to avoid - - the fact that - - someone might NOT really intend to KEEP them.

“I'll never be late again” can be a way of saying, “I'm sorry I was late”

“This will make you look years YOUNGER”,

might mean... what? “You're looking a bit - - OLD these days”.

So - - we might have a tendency to - - NOT BELIEVE - - big promises - - because of this.

We become like the storekeeper and the politician in the following story:

The politician asks the storekeeper for his support. / The store keeper says,

“Well - - I've ALREADY PROMISED my support to - - your opponent”.

“Promised?” - - asks the politician.

“Promised” - - repeats the storekeeper.

“Well - - no problem” says the politician, “You've JUST promised it”

“You haven't actually VOTED yet!”

“In politics - - promising - - and actually delivering are DIFFERENT things.”

“I see” says the store keeper, “I see”.

“So”, the politician asks, “NOW - - can I count on your support in the election”?

“I promise” - - - says the store keeper.

So - - we become skeptical - - and maybe even fearful - - of the future.

Skeptical CAN be good.

Skeptical protects us from getting HURT.

But - - it can ALSO keep us from TRUSTING - - and lead to FEAR.

I bring this up because God makes some INCREDIBLY - - BIG - - promises in the Bible.

In the Old Testament - - God promises Abraham - - a HOME.

The Old Testament history - - REVOLVES - - around this one BIG promise.

God MAKES this promise to Abraham in Genesis - - the FIRST book of the Bible. /

But then people of Israel end up in SLAVERY instead - - in Exodus. / They are FREED from slavery - - only to WANDER in the wilderness - - all through the books of Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy - - looking for a home.

And once they establish a home - - it isn't long before WAR and invasion - - make them homeless again - - and they go into exile. / Where they WAIT - - for years - - to return HOME.

Then they return home and try to rebuild.

The Psalms - - reflect on this experience.

Psalm 27 says:

“I have asked ONE THING - - of God.

Please God - - PROMISE me - - this ONE THING:

That I could LIVE in your HOUSE.

That I could be SHELTERED from trouble.

“God - - help me - - not to be AFRAID”

Have any of US - - ever prayed - - anything similar?

God - - help me not be afraid.

Both Abraham - - and Moses - - are ORIGINALLY SKEPTICAL.

These Old Testament characters - - both doubt God’s promise at first.

That we could be safe - - and free - - and at home - - without fear...?

And yet - - they spend the rest of their lives - - seeking it.

And they spend the rest of their lives - - following God.

God told Abraham that it would take time.

They would WANDER first.

God DISCLOSES this to Abraham.

Read Genesis chapter 15, for the full account...

So God tells Abraham - - but that doesn’t make it any easier - - of course.

These are big promises - - that Abraham WANTS to believe:

Freedom - - and safety - - and a home.

Promised - - as something yet to come - - after a time of trouble.

It’s the kind of thing that has happened - - again and again - - in the centuries since.

In various situations - - all over the world - - this is a familiar story.

During World War 2 - - for example - - there was a kind of promise - - or a kind of VISION - - or HOPE - - that the world would ONE DAY be BETTER. / People would eventually feel SAFE - - and FREE - - and at HOME.

But during the early years of the 1940s it was the opposite:

There was a lot of FEAR.

During the next few weeks - - the season we call Lent - - we will be exploring this HOPE for a sense of HOME. / And today - - particularly - - how that hope contains an impulse for SAFETY - - and freedom from FEAR.

The *Four Freedoms* is a series of oil paintings by the American artist Norman Rockwell. The four freedoms refer to President Franklin D. Roosevelt's January 1941 State of the Union address in which he identified four essential human rights that should be universally protected: freedom of SPEECH and WORSHIP, and freedom from WANT and from FEAR. The paintings, completed in 1943, were reproduced in the *Saturday Evening Post* over four weeks along with essays by famous writers of the time.

This morning we're looking at the painting called: "Freedom from Fear".

It's on your bulletin cover - - and up here on the screen...

The *Saturday Evening Post* essay about the painting for today: Freedom from Fear - - was written by, Stephen Vincent Benet, who was a Pulitzer Prize winning American poet.

In the *Post* essay he wrote this:

"Fear has walked at men's heels through many ages - - fear of wild beasts and of wilder nature... Now again in our time we know fear. / Armed fear is droning through the sky. / It's a different sound from the war whoop and the shot in a lonesome clearing - - and yet it is much the same for all of us:

"It is QUIET in the house at night - - and the children are asleep. / But innocence, good will, distance, peaceable intent, will NOT keep those children safe from fear in the sky. / No one can keep his house safe in a shrunken world. / No one can say, "This is MINE, keep out".

And yet - - if the world is to go on...the house...must be kept safe.

What do we mean by freedom from fear?

“We do NOT mean freedom from responsibility. / We do not mean freedom from struggle, toil, hardship and danger. We do NOT intend to breed a race wrapped in cotton woll and too delicate - - to stand rough weather.”

“But we have the chance, IF we have the BRAINS - - and the courage - - - we have the chance to destroy our worst fears. / It is NOT enough to say, “Here in our country we are strong. Let the rest of the world sink or swim. We can take care of ourselves.”. / “We are NOT an island in space, but a continent in the world. / Fear and ignorance a thousand miles away may spread pestilence in our own town.”

“Here is a house, a woman, a man, their children. They are not free from life and obligations. But they CAN be - - free form FEAR.”

Such was the promise - - of this painting - - during the height of tension - - as WW 2 neared an end - - decades ago.

Jesus - - in this morning’s gospel reading - - is at the height of tension.

Herod is out to get him.

Jesus was looking toward Jerusalem - - which represented the longed for home of his people for centuries - - and the Pharisees try to warn Jesus of danger.

“Herod is out to get you”!

And Jesus says, “Go tell that FOX - - that I am going to do - - what I am going to do”

I promise.

I promise to protect you.

Like a hen - - gathering her young.

So how do we face the fox - - in our day?

That’s something we will have to keep working on.

Paul gives us a clue about how Jesus did it, in the letter to the Philippians.

Jesus did NOT try to be a tougher meaner Herod.

He did the OPPOSITE.

Jesus did not get tougher and meaner - - he got HUMBLER.

Luke tells us that Jesus response to the fear about Herod was to point to the cross.

Paul says, in chapter 2, that Jesus humbled himself.

Specifically he said:

Jesus WAS equal to God - - BUT

But Jesus did not GRASP at that equality.

Instead he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.

Jesus humbled himself.

Jesus was obedient - - all the way to the cross.

And because of that - - GOD - - was exalted.

It's a powerful description of what Jesus did.

I don't know if Jesus was afraid or not.

But I know that because of that - - we DON'T have to be!

What Jesus did was truly - - amazing.

In fact - - if we dig into the Greek word that is usually translated "grasped" it becomes even MORE amazing. / In Greek the word is: "ARK - - AG - - MON"

It is usually translated: "something to be GRASPED, or EXPLOITED, or SEIZED"

Jesus did not count equality with God as something to be EXPLOITED.

An even more literal translation is this:

"Jesus did not count equality with God as a license to rape and loot"

It's a powerful translation - - if you know anything about Roman soldiers.

Roman soldiers were fighting for people like Herod - - and Caesar.

Caesar DID think he was equal to God.

And Roman soldiers - - because of that - - felt they had a license.

In war - - they could do whatever they wanted.

But Jesus - - was different.

His equality with God - - was not a license to kill - - or worse.

Jesus goal - - was not to create MORE fear.

Jesus - - sought - - to put an END to fear.

From where Jesus stood - - at the time of the gospel reading by Luke - - it was a long and challenging road ahead - - leading to Jerusalem - - and the cross.

But - - "he had promises to keep - - - and miles to go - - before he would sleep."

In the end - - Jesus would lead us to our TRUE HOME.

As Paul said in Philippians chapter 3:

"Our true home - - is in heaven"

Paul said that there are people who work AGAINST this PROMISE.

Focused on themselves and their own GREED.

But our commonwealth - - our citizenship - - our home - - is in heaven.

And as Dorothy said - - after the massive cyclone that nearly destroyed hers:

"There's no place like home... ...there's no place like home."

Amen