

“Promises”
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First Presbyterian Church of Moscow

December 3, 2017, First Sunday of Advent
Psalm 18: 30-33; 1 Kings 8:54-61;
Romans 4:1-8; Luke 1:39-55

It is wonderful to be together and to decorate the church together. As we put up the decorations, it is a way of preparing for the celebration of Christmas coming. Oftentimes we think a lot about the preparation, but this year I want to think a little bit about how there is a promise that we are preparing for.

In some ways, the decorations themselves are a promise. We put up the decorations, recognizing that they are there as a promise that we are going forward into this time of celebration. There's a lot of anticipation about the promise of what we will do together. I know as children, there is a promise and an expectation that there will be some presents that come. There is anticipation that comes with the promise.

As I think about the promises of God and how they are presented to us, if you look at Psalm 18, there's a suggestion that the promises of God are always true. It talks about security and safety. It is easy to grab hold of those and think about how we want God to make us secure and safe. Oftentimes I have that image of God creating a bulwark around us so we can sit inside the castle and be safe. We can eat, drink, and be merry in there and not have to worry about anything else.

Then I was struck by the description in Psalm 18 of the way God gives us security. It's striking to me, the metaphor that's used. The metaphor that's used is: he gives the deer on the heights secure footing. That's a little different than what I was thinking about. Securing the ability to walk along the edge of a cliff is not quite what I was expecting. So as I begin to think about what the promises of God are, it's not that God is going to come and wipe the world clean in a way that makes it all peaceful. It's not that there are going to be no cliffs, but that we can walk securely. That's a different kind of perspective.

It is as we think about that that I hear the words of Solomon and Paul and Mary. Solomon, as he is talking to the people, is telling them that God's promises are with them and give them rest. To fulfill those promises, he says, “Devote yourselves to God.” He doesn't say God is going to build a bulwark. He says, “As we go with God, we will know the way.”

Paul is talking about Abraham, and he says that Abraham has righteousness reckoned to him because of his faith. It's not that Abraham has done everything right. It's not that Abraham is perfect, but he continues to look to God. He continues to trust in God. He continues to go ahead and take the journey with God, and in doing that he is reckoned as righteous—that is, God gives him a right relationship with Him.

And then we come to Mary, who also speaks into this idea of what God is doing. Again, God is not going out and physically scattering the proud or taking away all the rulers. The description is that what God does, instead of working with all the rulers and the powerful and the rich, is he comes to a lowly person and he works in her life and through her life. He invites us to recognize that it is in our lives, as we accept God's coming to us and inviting us to be God's people, that God works.

It feels to me like the promise God is giving us is that God will be with us and will guide us, will give us a way through. We will be able to walk those high places, those dangerous cliffs or perhaps those dark valleys—even the valley of the shadow of death. The promise is not that the world will absolutely change overnight, but that God will walk through it with us. In walking through it with us, I think he is making us the fulfillment of his promise.

You see, it is as we begin to take on God's will and God's way, as we begin to be those who show God's love and God's grace, as we live in that grace, we create the world God promises. We are the fulfillment of God's promise as we live into his promise. I literally believe that one of the reasons we struggle to have a world where God's promises are fulfilled is because we don't believe them, so we don't live into them. If we don't live into them, they don't happen because God is giving us the opportunity to live into God's promise, to be that promise.

What's the description that God gives us of Jesus coming? A light in the darkness. That light is opening our eyes. It's showing us the way. It's illumining who we are and the world around us. It is inviting us to live differently, to be God's people, to share God's love, to experience God's grace. It is as we do that—as we allow God to illumine our world for us, be the light and show us the way—that the proud are scattered, the lowly are lifted up, the hungry are fed.

It is as we live into God's way, as we become God's kingdom, as we recognize that light, as we begin our movement toward Christmas, as we remember the coming of God's light among us, it is again an invitation to be God's people, to recognize God's love for us that we might then share it with one another. It is as we walk in faith that hope and love can truly be seen and God's promises can be fulfilled. Amen.