

Third Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:38-39

"God's Sure Promises"

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Worship Report

He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! The text for our message is the First Lesson read a few moments ago, particularly Acts 2:38-39: "And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." Thus far God's Word.

Friends of our risen Savior: a pastor once visited one of his older female members who was living in a nursing home. He found the woman crying. She told her pastor that she wished there was no such thing as Mother's Day. All year long her family promised to come and visit her. Then, one day out of the year, Mother's Day, they descend on her, showering her with gifts and sentimental affection, promising to visit her again soon, but never following through on their promises. Promises, promises, promises!

A mother of three had a lot of work to do around the house. All three of her children promised that they would help. The first one, however, dawdled around, teased his sisters, and made a general nuisance of himself. The second just stood around doing nothing without being instructed in what to do and how to do it. The third child did everything in such a dreamy and absent minded way that the mother had to do it all over again. Promises, promises, promises!

So many broken promises, and not just in our families, but even more so beyond the confines of our homes: false advertisements, broken contracts, neglected treaties. One comic strip in a Sunday newspaper had a politician saying, "My friends always know they can count on me for one thing: I never keep my promises!"

Yet, despite the broken promises of people around us in the world, even in our own homes, we happen to live in a world where God has kept every one of his promises. We live in a world where God signed his name indelibly, making a promise on Calvary's cross where his only begotten Son died for the sins of the world. We live in a world where God has shown the glory of his promise with an empty tomb and a risen Savior. We live in a world where God is totally and clearly committed to us and to all people. God's sure promises are for you, for your children, and for all whom he will call to himself.

That is exactly what the Apostle Peter is talking about in the lesson today from Acts. The scene is Pentecost and Jews from all over the world have come to Jerusalem for this festival at the close of the grain season. It is ten days since Jesus' ascension, fifty days since our Lord's resurrection. Peter, the disciple who denied Jesus three times just prior to his crucifixion, now stands up in the midst of the assembly and boldly proclaims the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the salvation of all. Peter states that they should repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins, and they will receive the Holy Spirit. That is the promise for them, as well as for their children, together with all who are far off.

What a promise – a twofold promise: the forgiveness of all our sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit! The promise is grounded and offered through Jesus Christ. He and he alone is the medium of divine forgiveness. It is not something that we can earn or something we deserve. No one but Jesus Christ could have attained this for us. You see, we are all sinners. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We certainly don't deserve forgiveness. But, God's forgiveness has been given freely. It is a pardon that has been won for all because in Jesus Christ, God became a man in order to live a perfect life in our stead, and then to suffer and die in our place. Jesus Christ's suffering and death on the cross is the basis for God's promise of forgiveness. Jesus' resurrection on Easter morning is the guarantee that the sacrifice has been accepted by God the Father. The price has been paid. Our redemption has been accomplished.

But, there's more to this promise. Remember – it's a twofer! We also receive, along with complete

forgiveness of all our sins, the Holy Spirit, the third Person of our Three in One God. The Holy Spirit is the one who brings us to faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior so that we accept and trust that God's promises of forgiveness in Christ are actually ours. The Holy Spirit is the One who helps us live a God pleasing life. He is the one who keeps us in faith, even unto eternal life. The Holy Spirit does all of this by coming and making your heart his home.

You may try to teach a child the meaning of the term sweetness; but just words won't really do it. Put some honey or sugar in the child's mouth and he or she will never forget what the words sweet or sweetness mean. So the Holy Spirit does not just tell us about God's love in Jesus, but he puts it in our hearts. He works through very real and visible ways to do that – through God's Word and Sacraments. He doesn't merely tell us of the sweetness of forgiveness, but he gives us the confident certainty that through faith in Jesus Christ we do not stand condemned, but we are right with God. And the Holy Spirit gives us this confident certainty again and again as we hear God's Word and receive our Lord's Supper. We figuratively and literally taste and see that the Lord is good.

You see, the Holy Spirit isn't just some impersonal force. Nor is he merely a tongue of fire or only a dove coming down from heaven. He is, as Jesus said, our personal friend, our counselor, our helper who individually and personally brings all of God's promises to us, making those promises our very own, for each and every one of us. In a world that is full of broken promises from many people, we have God's promises, which are sure! We have the twofold promise that through faith in Jesus Christ we are forgiven and that we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in and with us, making God's promises our own.

To really drive the message of this promise home, the Apostle Peter says that this promise is for YOU and for YOUR children. It's not just for someone at the other end of the world. It's not just for someone 1,980 some years ago. This promise is for you. It is yours when, by the power of the Holy Spirit, you repent. Now, you may wonder what in the world Peter meant by that? The word "repent" or "repentance" can bring up all sorts of unpleasant images of groveling, fasting, or even self abuse. Is that what Peter meant? Not at all! The Greek word here which we translate "repent," "METENOIA", actually means to turn around. You are headed in the wrong direction, and you are turned around and pointed in the right direction. Dwight Moody, the famous American evangelist in the latter part of the 19th century put it this way: "Repentance is an about face. Everyone is born with his back to God. Repentance turns them right around out of Satan's service into the Lord's."

Repentance is the Holy Spirit working in your life through God's Word of Law and Gospel to turn you around in faith toward God. The Law tells us what to do and what not to do. Because we don't keep the Law, it condemns us and shows us our sin. It brings us to true sorrow and despair over our sin, as we recognize that we can't save ourselves. The Gospel tells us what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, paying the price for our sins, giving us forgiveness and the Holy Spirit. The Gospel assures us of our forgiveness and eternal salvation through Christ. Believing all of this is what repentance is all about, and this faith is what connects us to God's promises, when we receive these promises as our own – that is saving faith!

Another thing which the Apostle Peter mentions that makes God's promises yours and mine personally and individually is Baptism. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, states that in Baptism you put on Christ. In his letter to the Romans, Paul tells us that in Baptism we are connected to Jesus' death and resurrection. Your Baptism becomes a constant reminder of God's wonderful promises to you. You are his child. With water and his Word, he put his name, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, on you. His promises are therefore surely yours. So, daily we repent of our sins and remember that we are baptized: buried and raised with Christ. God's promises are therefore sure, and they are most certainly yours.

So, through repentance and Baptism you are assured that God's promises are for you. You have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you. He has worked faith in your heart, faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. As a result, you have forgiveness of your sins and the hope of eternal life in heaven. Of that you can be sure, confident, certain!

This is something that should bring great joy to your life. You have a promise, a sure promise from God, even while you continue to live in a world filled with all sorts of broken promises. The joy of knowing, believing and trusting God's promises can spill over in your life to others, especially to those closest to you, especially to those whom God has used to bring so many wonderful blessings into your lives – like your mother and your wife, whom we remember today on this Mother's Day. The fact that God keeps all his promises to us can motivate us to keep our promises to others, especially our family members and loved ones. Remember, we have God's promised Holy Spirit, and the fruits of the Spirit include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Those fruits will manifest themselves to others.

Promises, promises, promises! I know we all get tired of broken promises. But God's promises are sure. God's promises are for you, for your children and for those who are far off. His are promises of forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit. They are promises that come through repentance and Baptism, by which we cling in faith to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Hold fast to God's sure promises.

There's an old story of a king and his wife, who had a dreadful quarrel because the queen had done something terrible against the king and the kingdom. Filled with rage, the king told the queen that she would be put to death if he ever saw her again. She was banished from the kingdom. While she was packing her things, the queen, in great anguish, sorrow and despair, racked her brains as to how she might attain her husband's forgiveness and love. Just then, their little son came into the room, and she was moved to try something. She took the king's child, his only son, into her arms and looked for the king. When she found the king, she went directly toward him with his son in her arms and asked his forgiveness for his son's sake. When the king beheld his only son in the arms of his estranged wife, he went toward her, embraced her and promised that he forgave her. For the sake of his son he gave her that promise. So God, the King of kings, deals with us who daily offend him with our sins. When we approach him, holding in the arms of faith his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, the Son who died for our sins on Calvary's cross, God cannot but grant us forgiveness of all our sins. He has promised us this forgiveness together with his Holy Spirit. These promises are for you. These promises are for your children. These promises are sure, even in a world where so many other things are uncertain. You have those promises before you and in you now, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**