

# Sermons at First Church

**A Ministry of the Word**  
**February 22, 2015**

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**First Presbyterian Church**  
**Clarksburg, WV**

**Genesis 9:8-17**

**I Peter 3:18-22**

*Then God said to Noah . . . "I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.*

*(Genesis 9:8 & 11 N.R.S.V.)*

*For Christ also suffered for sins once for all the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. (I Peter 3:18 N.R.S.V.)*

## **The Original Promise Keeper**

I am a child of God. I believe in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. And I believe he has the power to change my life and your life.

Our Old Testament lesson today is one of the most famous and well known of Bible stories. After Adam and Eve sinned by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God kicked them out of the Garden of Eden. From there on things just went from bad to worse. One of Adam and Eve's sons, Cain, murdered his brother, Abel. From there human beings multiplied and spread over the face of the earth and their evil deeds multiplied as well. By the time of Noah, things were so bad that God decided to start over. He told Noah and his sons to build an ark and to take their wives and families and pairs of all the animals and get on the ark. Noah and his family did as God told them.

Then God sent a mighty flood which covered the earth and wiped out all land life on earth except for those on the ark. Afterwards God made a promise that he would never again wipe out all life on earth with a flood. And God placed the rainbow in the sky as a reminder to himself to keep his promise, no matter what.

All right, so here is a bit of trivia that you may not remember. It is something to stump your friends with. How many of each kind of animal did Noah take onto the ark? As you can guess from the question, the answer is not "two." Never mind that every picture we have ever seen of Noah and the ark has the animals all coming on to the ark two of each kind.

In Genesis chapter six God tells Noah to take a male and a female of each living creature onto the ark. Then in chapter seven, God expands on that. "Then the Lord said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you alone are righteous before me in this

generation. Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and its mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and its mate; and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive on the face of all the earth.” (Genesis 7:1-3)

So the answer is that Noah took seven pairs of the clean animals. The clean animals were the animals that were fit for humans to eat - sheep, goats, cattle. Also seven pairs of all the birds. Then only one pair of all the animals not fit to eat. As Dorothy says in the Wizard of Oz - “Lions and tigers and bears, O my!”

Isn't it amazing that no matter how often we have read the Bible or listened to sermons on various parts of scripture, God always has something new for us. What might God be saying that is new to you this morning?

One of the things that jumps out to me this morning is that our God makes and keeps promises. We can trust God, because he will keep his promises. God is not only the original promise maker. God is the original promise keeper.

Promises are very important to us. As any parent knows, promises are very important to children as well. Kept promises are how children learn to trust. And don't worry parents if you have forgotten this. Children are quick to point out, “But Daddy you promised.” “Mommy, you promised.” If there is anything we hate, it is to disappoint our children.

Yet there are some things that are simply beyond our control. Charla remembers when her oldest nephew Michael was four years old and his Daddy had promised to take him to Disney World. Michael was super excited about that. He just couldn't wait to get there.

Sadly when the family got to there, they were told that the park had reached capacity, and no more people were being allowed in that day. Charla will never forget little Michael standing there outside the park with tears in his big blue eyes. “No Goofy?” “But Daddy you promised.”

Unlike people, God always keeps his promises. This promise in Genesis is a very powerful one indeed. Notice that in the scripture passage from Genesis 9, God promises to hang his bow in the clouds. It doesn't say “rainbow,” although we know that is what is meant here, it says “bow.” I mention that because the Hebrew word that is translated “bow,” refers to a bow and arrow like that used in war. The promise that God makes here is that he will not wage war on us. He will hang up his weapon of war, and promise that from now on, he will never again be against people. He will always be for us. God is not out to get you. God is out to save you.

Notice also that God's promise has no qualifier. God doesn't say, as long as you follow me, I will be for you. God says he is hanging up his war bow, period.

This is an entirely different kind of promise than one we are used to hearing. I read a funny story about a tired man who told his little daughter that he was very tired and he was going to take a nap. He made her promise that she would be good and not wake him up from his nap.

The little girl waited all of five minutes before she woke him up to ask him a question. He was very grumpy and so he said, “Didn’t you promise me that you would not wake me up?”

“Yes, Daddy,” she said.

“And didn’t I promise you that if you were not good you would be punished,” he continued rather harshly.

The little girl said in a soft voice. “Yes, Daddy, but since I didn’t keep my promise, you don’t have to keep yours.”

So much of what we promise each other is conditional on the other person. I’ll love you as long as you love me. I will be faithful to you as long as you are faithful to me.

God’s promise here, however, is not conditional on what we do. God says, “I will not destroy the earth again by water. I will hang up my war bow. I will be for you.”

Not only is God’s promise unconditional, it is costly. Keeping this promise meant that God took on human flesh in Jesus Christ. He shared our human condition. He died on the cross for our forgiveness. He rose to glory so that all those who believe in him may also know everlasting life.

God hung up his war bow. In John 3:17 we read these words, “Indeed, God did not send the son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

God is the original promise maker. God is also the original promise keeper. God keeps his promises even when it is inconvenient. God keeps his promises even though he had to pay the ultimate price.

We live in a world where it is easy to get disillusioned by all of the people who play fast and loose with their promises. I am reminded of one of the past governors of West Virginia who promised the people of Parkersburg, that if he were elected he would make St. Rt. 2 a four lane highway through Parkersburg.

When he was elected, he kept his promise by rerouting St. Rt. 2 up interstate 77 through Parkersburg and renaming the old road as St. Rt. 68. Technically he could claim he kept his promise. But paretically speaking he weaseled out of it. He let the people of Parkersburg down.

So much of life is like that. Yet every once in awhile we see a refection of the God who keeps promises even when that is inconvenient and costly.

Dr. Wayne Dyer in his book, “A Promise Is a Promise,” tells the true story of a mother who has cared for her comatose daughter for over twenty-eight years. She feeds her daughter every two hours around the clock, turning her, giving her insulin every four hours, raising the money to pay all expenses, and sleeping in a chair every night next to her daughter’s side.

Twenty-eight years ago, Edwarda, then sixteen years old, pleaded, “You won’t leave me will you Mommy?” as she was slipping into a diabetic coma.

Kaye, her mother, responded, “I will never leave you, darling, I promise. And a promise is a promise.”

In the twenty-eight years that her mother has kept vigil, Edwarda has never regained consciousness. Yet she has moved from a very comose state to a state where she sometimes seems to respond to voices in the room. The most amazing part of this story is the effect that Edwarda has on those who visit. Everyone talks about the unconditional love Edwarda radiates from her immobile body, and some have experienced miraculous healing. (Dynamic Preaching, Jan.-Mar. 2015, pg. 52)

There is such an awesome power in a promise that is kept. Some of you have seen it in your parents. Some of you have seen it in your own spouse. Some of you have seen it in the faithfulness of good friends. Some of you have experienced it while going through a dark hour when you desperately needed God, and God was there for you.

God has promised in the rainbow to always be for you. God has promised in Jesus Christ to never leave you or forsake you. There is awesome power in that kind of kept promises.

God as the original promise keeper invites you imitate him. To be a keeper of promises even when it is inconvenient and oh so costly.

Lewis Smedes once wrote, “Somewhere people still make and keep promises. They choose not to quit when the going gets rough because they promised once to see it through. They stick to lost causes. They hold on to a love grown cold. They stay with people who have become pains in the neck. They still dare to make promises and care enough to keep the promises they make. I want to say to you that if you have a ship you will not desert, if you have people you will not forsake, if you have causes you will not abandon, then you are like God. (Tom Long, Editor, A Chorus of Witnesses (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994).

God’s challenges to us is to imitate him, to be promise keepers. If in the past you have failed to keep a promise, know that God’s forgiveness and grace is sufficient for you. God will not leave you or abandon you, his promise is sure. More than that, God gives second chances, and third and fourth chances to get it right to be a true reflection of him and his love.

Those who are promise keepers make an uncertain future, certain at least in one small way. They will be there doing their part. And the world will be a far better place for it.

Amen.