

Sermon: Promises and Pledges

Year B, Proper 28

[1 Samuel 1:4-20; 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Daniel 12:1-3; Psalm 16; Hebrews 10:11-25; Mark 13:1-8](#)

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Oh those big stones in our lives, the ones that are stacked up one on the other that keep us living large. Our to-do lists that we add to and cross out against, and add to in order to cross out. Changing the oil in our car every 5,000 miles. Eating plenty of fruit and vegetables. Bringing the good stuff to Thanksgiving, not the store bought, no name, on-sale-today-everything-must-go pumpkin pie. We stack up all the stuff we're supposed to be doing, and we act like it's enough to keep our life on track, that if we do that well enough, we can keep from the wars and earthquakes and famines of divorce and unemployment and loss.

And then Jesus comes along and says, "Nope, that's just the stuff you trip over, that's the stuff that leads you astray." And we so want to argue with him. "Look," we want to say, "I don't get the oil changed, and no one is getting to Thanksgiving, no one is dropping off presents for the families we're supporting through SHARE, no one is getting the front walkway of the church shoveled." We want to argue with Jesus, because the large stones we've built our lives on and around *are* important. You show me a minister or a parent going into Thanksgiving without a to-do list, and I'll show you tears on Christmas Eve, guaranteed.

We want to argue with Jesus that all these large stones are important, are what we are built on. And still, we know he is right too. We know all that stuff can lead us astray. Because today we have gathered together to baptize Landry and Harper. We made promises to them and to each other that we would do everything we could to help them to thrive. We've made similar promises to all the children of this church, as well as to their parents, as well as to each other. No one can do it alone. We all rely on the help of God. Joy Unspeakable, Faith Unsinkable, Love Unstoppable, Anything is possible. In the moment we make our promises, that's what it feels like. That's the large stone we need to build our lives on, those promises.

We want to argue with Jesus, and yet we know he's right. We do need to care for this large building, with its great stones in the foundation, and large windows, and plenty of space in the pews. But Jesus is right that what leads us astray is when we focus on the money and the building to the extent that we forget the real mission of the church, to love God and love our neighbors. We are led astray when we think that our money is enough. It's not enough. It's never enough. God wants all of us to show up, all the gifts we know we have and whole bunch more we didn't expect. God wants us to show up with all we have been given and be open to even more surprising gifts that God has yet to give us. Joy Unspeakable, Faith Unsinkable, Love Unstoppable, Anything is possible. In the moment we make our pledges, that's what it feels like. That's the large stone we need to build our lives on, those pledges.

We live in a time when it feels like disaster is just over the horizon. We can't seem to talk to each other anymore. The world is warming in ways we can't seem to combat. Things we used to be able to build lives around like college educations and owning your own home and respecting your elders don't seem to work anymore, or not work the way we were used to. And we wonder if those are the signs we were supposed to look for, for things coming off the rails, for God returning to this world. Because if things are going off the rails and God is about to

show up again, maybe I don't need to worry about items 6 to 13 on my to-do list. Maybe a couple thousand more miles in the car isn't going to make any difference one way or another.

Jesus understood that too. That's why he warned us about that feeling, and how easily we might be led astray. He wanted to urge us to return to what was worth building our lives one and around, our promises, our pledges. Jesus wanted to make sure we were built around that things that last, so that we could take on the challenges this world offer. Together, we can absolutely tackle the issues that divide us; come to a small country church every Sunday and practice what it is like to truly love someone with a different lawn sign than your own. Together we can absolutely handle climate change so Landry and Harper and all the other children of this church can enjoy a beautiful and habitable and diverse planet. Together we can look for even more ways to build thriving lives that include and extended the mechanisms we had before like education and home ownership and respect for authority. Together, all of us, and God. Promises and Pledges. Joy Unspeakable, Faith Unsinkable, Love Unstoppable, Anything is possible.