

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"Promises, Promises"

Scripture: Genesis 15:1-12,17-18

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Songs/Hymns: #330 O God, our help in ages past, Days of Elijah (Robin Mark) #579 I have decided to follow Jesus #744 Will your anchor hold

Many of you are familiar

With the Winnie-the-Pooh and his stuffed-animal friends
In those children's story books written by A.A. Milne.

One of my favorite characters is that loveable

But gloomy donkey Eeyore.

Listen to this conversation between Eeyore and Owl:

"Eeyore", said Owl, "Christopher Robin is giving a party."

"Very interesting," said Eeyore.

**"I suppose they will be sending me
down the odd bits
which got trodden on."**

Kind and Thoughtful.

Not at all, don't mention it."

"There is an Invitation for you."

"What's that like?"

"An Invitation!"

"Yes, I heard you.

Who dropped it?"

"This isn't something to eat, it's asking you to the party.
To-morrow."

Eeyore shook his head slowly.

"You mean Piglet.

The little fellow with the exited ears.

That's Piglet. I'll tell him."

"No, no!" said Owl, getting quite fussy. "It's you!"

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure.

Christopher Robin said 'All of them! Tell all of them'"

"All of them, except Eeyore?"

"All of them," said Owl sulkily.

"Ah!" said Eeyore.

"A mistake, no doubt, but still, I shall come.

Only don't blame me when it rains."i

Eeyore is a sympathetic even beloved character.

He lives under a dark cloud

And his gloom causes all sorts of misunderstandings.

Most of us know people like Eeyore.

Some of us see him in the mirror.

Whether we have a melancholy temperament
Or are biologically predisposed to depression,
Sometimes we just expect the worst.

Sometimes we have a hard time believing
That God has good things for us.

PAUSE

In today's Bible lesson we meet Abram.
This is not the first time he is encountered in the Bible.

Earlier in Genesis 12 we read how God called 75-year-old Abram
To leave his home for a new land.

In addition to that land
God promises to make him a nation
and a source of blessing for those around him.

On the basis of this call and these promises
Abram sets out on a journey.

Today we are in chapter 15,
And time has certainly passed.
Abram has miles
but those promises of God aren't any closer.

He remains childless.
He has no land to his name.

So when God speaks to him again today,
“Do not be afraid, Abram.
I am your shield,
your very great reward.”,
Abram resists this assertion.

“Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless
and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?”ⁱⁱ

The promise of any reward is of no benefit
As long as Abram has no descendants.
All he has will simply go to his servants.

And if God’s earlier promise offered faint hope for an aged couple
God’s delay meant they are now much older,
Into their 80s and 90s.

Having a child now is impossible!

Abram complains about the lack of an heir.
Abram laments about the unkept promise.

But then God takes him outside
And directs he eyes heavenward:

“Look up at the sky and count the stars—
if indeed you can count them
...So shall your offspring be.”ⁱⁱⁱ

PAUSE

Abram complains, “Promises, promises!
God--you haven’t delivered on your commitment.”,
And God doubles-down and increases his pledge
And tells him he will have more children than he count.

Gods promise set against the backdrop of the nite sky
Makes a big impact on Abram.

The Bible tells us that Abram “believed the Lord”
And that this was credited to him “as righteousness”.
That is Abram decided to rely on God
And God declared him to be the kind of partner
He is looking for.

So what explains this change in outlook?

Biblical scholar Walter Bruggemann argues:
“Surely it is not because [Abram]
feels new generative powers in his loins.
Nor because he has new expectations for Sarah...

Rather, [Abram] has come to rely on the promise speaker.
[Abram] has now permitted God to be
not a hypothesis about the future
but the voice around which his life is organised.”^{iv}

Abram organises his life not according to his own feelings,
Or his observations about how life works
But according to God’s promises.

I wonder how that experience of encountering God's promises
Under the nite sky changed Abram's approach to life?

I imagine him getting out of bed a little quicker the next morning
excited to greet the new day.

I can imagine him smiling instead of frowning
When he hears neighbor's grandchildren
yelling and screaming next door.

I imagine him giving his wife suggestive looks
Across the dinner table later that evening.

Yes, Abram's faith will waver from time to time.
But now he has a hope. Now he has a future.
And it changes just about everything.

PAUSE

God made some big promises to Abram
And has made some big promises to us as well.

Don't believe me?
Just start flipping through the pages of the Bible.

We are promised renewed strength in Isaiah (Isaiah 40:31).
We are promised hope and a future in Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29:11).
The Psalms speak of God walking with us (Psalm 23).

Jesus promises sacrifices and life,
rewards and persecutions (Mark 10:29-31, Matthew 16:24-25).

Jesus offers us life that is abundant and full (John 10:10).
Jesus says he will answer our prayers,
And won't turn away,
anyone who comes to him (John 14:13, 6:37)

Jesus says God sent him to give us a life that is eternal (John 3:16).

Like Abram when God first addresses him
you may not believe that these promises
have any relevance for your life situation.

How can you have a life that is full
when you battle daily with a chronic illness?
How can there be a future
when you are barely managing the present?
How can there be a future,
when you can't even find a job?

Maybe we need to ponder God's word to us.
Maybe we also need to spend some time staring at the stars.

When we reflect on the enormity and complexity of God's handiwork
And at the same time consider those promises God has made to us
We too might find ourselves
being able to imagine the impossible.

We too might find ourselves believing in God's future
When the present offers no hope.

Our friend Eeyore is known for expecting the worst:

**“It’s the only cloud in the sky.
And it’s drizzling. Right on me.
Somehow, I am not surprised.”**

But on a good day,
the person who is holding on to God's promises
Is able to say “Yes, it is stormy.

I’m cold.
I’m wet.
My fingers are numb.

Yes it is stormy,
but soon it will be sunny.

...and I can hardly wait.

May we all hold on to God's good future,
No matter how we are struggling with the present.
Amen and amen.

ⁱ A.A. Milne <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/6576740-eyore-said-owl-christopher-robin-is-giving-a-party-very>

ⁱⁱ Genesis 15:2 NIV

ⁱⁱⁱ Genesis 15:5 NIV

^{iv} Walter Brueggemann *Genesis* 144