

## **The Reverend Theo Robinson's Sermon for March 15, 2026**

### **Matthew 26:30-35, 69-75 - "Broken Promises"**

Grace, peace, and mercy are yours from the Triune God. Amen.

A couple of weeks ago, Liz preached on the concept of trust and how easy it is to lose trust in others, causing us to turn inward, trusting only in ourselves. From my experience, the fastest route to broken trust is through broken promises.

Have you ever had something promised to you, only to have it taken away? A job or a promotion, perhaps? Or maybe a raise at work?

One person lying to another is a form of a broken promise. Like a promise to show up at an event for you, maybe a birthday party or a celebratory dinner, only to not show up at all.

How do these broken promises make you feel?

One of my favorite shows in my teen years was the Fresh Prince of Bel-Air. In one episode, Will's dad, who had abandoned him when he was little, came back into his life and made all sorts of promises to take Will with him on the road (he was a truck driver) and telling Will they'd be together again. Despite warnings from Uncle Phil, Will was super excited his dad had come for him and was ready to hit the road. Not really unexpected to the audience, Will's dad snuck out on him just as he had done when he was a little boy, breaking Will's heart all over again.

I have done a lot of reading over the past few years on Indigenous and Settler history, relationships, and reconciliation. The book I'm currently reading is called "52 Ways to Reconcile." If you want to hear more about it, feel free to ask me later. But in one chapter, it reminded me that the treaties signed all those years ago were based on promises – promises to exchange land for things like cash, blankets, clothing, community schools, and farm equipment. All that conversation is for another time. My point is that just as easily as those promises were made (noting that the Indigenous people couldn't read the documents put before them), those promises were broken, and most remain broken to this day.

These are just a couple of examples of how easy it is to break a promise. Sometimes it feels like we have become quite calloused to the problem of broken promises. Our default tends to be an expectation that promises will be broken. Words come cheap. It is so easy to blurt out a promise, but it is harder to keep that promise.

In our reading today, our main man Peter seems to be struggling with things that were easy to say and hard to do. The night started off well, twelve friends gathered around a table, sharing a meal. Celebrating the Passover, as one does. Maybe telling stories about everything that happened over the last while. You know, just relaxing and taking a load off. And then Jesus decided that now was the time to get serious. First, he institutes the Lord's Supper, and then he says, "You will all fall away because of me this night, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'"

Jesus reveals to his group of friends that he knows they will scatter from him when things get hard. He already identified Judas as a betrayer and declares that the rest of them are about to do the same thing – desert their teacher. Peter would have none of it, and he let Jesus know it. “No way will I ever leave you,” he says. Jesus insists, “Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” Peter jumps in and promises he’d never do that. “I promise. I pinky swear. I’m going anywhere. No matter what!” The rest of the guys are nodding their heads in agreement.

Well, we know how the rest of that story goes, don’t we? In fear for his life, watching what was happening to Jesus, and terrified the same would happen to him, not once, not twice, but three times Peter denies his association with Jesus. He had made a promise to Jesus to never abandon him, and yet, when the moment came, when he felt the threat of danger and suffering, he folded and collapsed. He forgot his promise. He knew it, too. As soon as that cock crowed, “he went out and wept bitterly.”

So easy was it for him to throw out the promise to stay at Jesus’ side, but when times got hard, Peter chose to keep a distance and to deny his relationship with Jesus. The other 10 weren’t any better. When Jesus needed his people the most, they weren’t there for him. Twelve broken promises.

Luther teaches that when Peter three times denied Jesus it was no mere backsliding, but it was the rejection of Christ and the death of faith. There in the courtyard, with the denial echoing off the hard walls, Peter was lost. If we read a little further on, we know that there’s hope for Peter. He turns to Jesus who then forgives him and even restores Peter’s place in the group.

While Judas’ story is a lesson on broken trust, Peter’s story warns us of the problem of broken promises. He warns us about the problem of words quickly and idly spoken that prove difficult and costly to keep. Peter shows us what it’s like to break a promise.

We are often too quick to judge poor Peter, however. Put yourself in his shoes. Have you ever missed a chance to witness with bold confidence to the truth of God? Have you ever been part of a conversation when you wanted to make your faith clear, but somehow you just couldn’t find the words, so you simply chose to remain silent? Have you ever decided it was easier to not let the people around you now that you are Christian? Have you ever seen someone in need and averted your eyes? Our promise to Jesus might not look quite the same as Peter’s but we are just as likely to break our promise to him as Peter did. We are, after all, simply human.

But, as with Peter, we know that in these lowest of times, we can look to Jesus for forgiveness and restoration. In Jesus, we are forgiven for our slip-ups and are given strength to try and keep our promises to the best of our ability. Jesus’ grace and forgiveness is ours forever. The work we need to do in our lives is to be aware of throwing around the words “I promise”. Our task is to take that strength that Jesus gives us and put action behind promises made – whether to ourselves or to others. Our responsibility is to avoid empty promises, knowing how we feel when it happens to us. Here, in our community of faith, we can hold ourselves accountable to each other knowing that even if we slip up, even if we break our promises, Jesus will always restore our place in the group.

Amen.