

Broken Peter; Broken Promises

St. Giles Presbyterian Church

March 13, 2016.

Matthew 26:30-35, 69-75

John 21: 15 - 19

Need: a copy of the Book of Forms

Sunday, March 13, 2016

St. Giles Presbyterian Church

1. Address the Minister in Association – making promises to the congregation.

Related to theme of Broken Promises of the theme.

Good morning St. Giles Presbyterian Church. This is the fifth Sunday in Lent, as we prepare to celebrate Easter.

Our lesson this morning is taken from both the book of Matthew, chapter 26 and the book of John, chapter 21. And in these two places of scripture, we'll be taking a look at that famous passage where in the last hours of Jesus life before his death on the cross we see that Jesus foretells that even his closest followers would leave him.

This passage fits in perfectly with our sermon this morning, which is called The Challenge of Broken Promises.

The Challenge of Broken Promises is something that I'm sure we can all relate to.

We've all been there. People have made promises to us and have broken them. And

WE have made promises to others, and sometimes we aren't able to keep those promises. And it hurts, doesn't it?

Our lesson will focus on the challenge of broken promises and we'll see how Christ himself modelled for us what we should do. Our Lord and Saviour provides for us the perfect role model.

Promises are a big thing in our world today. We take promises seriously. In fact, we take promises so seriously that I wanted to share with you the promise that I have made with all of you. If you remember last week, Rev. Hilder announced to the congregation that through the Session and the Presbytery, I have been recognized as the Minister in Association here at St. Giles Presbyterian Church.

A Minister in Association isn't something that we pulled out of thin air. In fact, the Minister in Association is something that is written in the Book of Forms. If you're not familiar with the Book of Forms, I won't bore you with the polity or the politics of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. But, the best way for me to describe it is that the Book of Forms is written as the guidelines that help lead and guide the Presbyterian Church in Canada as a denomination. In the Book of Forms it describes the Minister in Association as this:

“Ministers in good and regular standing, who are not called by or appointed to congregation, should be associated with a congregation.”

In becoming Minister in Association, an agreement is made between the session and the minister.

As well, in the book of forms says that an agreement of the nature of service the Minister in Association will offer to the congregation and its pastor, and all of this will be sent to the presbytery for approval.

As for the nature of the service or the promise that was agreed upon by the Session and myself, they include:

- *To attend worship faithfully when able*
- *To give to the work of the congregation as God prospers him*
- *To pray for the welfare of minister, office bearers, members and adherents of the congregation*
- *To use his gifts for the good of Christ's mission in and through the congregation when called upon*

More particularly, he undertakes to preach when called upon, to lead study groups when invited and to give advice and counsel when appropriate.

I tell all of this to you for two reasons.

First of all, so that it will help answer any questions with regards to our family's part in the life of the congregation at St. Giles.

However, secondly, I tell you all of this because I wanted to make sure that everyone understood how seriously the Presbyterian Church in Canada takes these promises. In fact promises are so important that it had to be formalized both at the Session level and at the Presbytery level.

And, God willing, I hope that I can keep the promises made with all of you

2. Transition – we are all familiar with Peter's denial of Christ; why is it significant?

Our lesson this morning then focuses on Promises, but more specifically about the Challenge of Broken Promises. When we read of Peter's Denial, often times, we gloss over this account. It is a familiar passage as we read it over and over again as we prepare for the coming of Easter. But if we fall into the temptation of merely just reading the passage as Jesus predicting that Peter will deny him not once, not twice, but three times, we miss the significance of what is really happening here.

The denial of Jesus is much more than just Peter denying that he KNEW Jesus.

The denial is much more than just Peter trying to save his own skin.

The denial of Jesus is a betrayal of the relationship that Peter had with Jesus.

During Lent and Easter when we think of betrayal, we automatically think of Judas.

Judas was the one that led the chief priests to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Judas was the one that betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

Judas was the one that kissed Jesus in order to identify to the arresting soldiers who Jesus truly was.

In all of this though, I would argue that Peter's denial of Jesus was equally devastating.

The REASON for this lies in the relationship that both Peter had with Jesus. We remember that Peter was part of the 12 disciples. And that he was included in the inner circle. But what did that relationship really look like?

As modern thinkers and readers of the Word, we imagine that the student and the teacher relationship MUST resemble what our understanding of that relationship might be.

As a student, we are assigned to a classroom. There is a teacher who generally spends a year teaching us the material that is prepared for us. We learn arithmetic, English, French, science and Art. The list goes on and on. And when summer comes and class lets out, our time with the teacher is finished. We have our summer vacation and as Fall draws near, we prepare for a new class and of course, a new teacher.

But the student – teacher relationship during the time of Jesus was quite different. And the reason for this is because the education system was based on the Rabbis.

In the Rabbinic system, children would start going to school at the age of four or five years old and there, they would learn the Torah. And the Torah meant that they learned the scriptures of the first five books of what we know as the Old Testament. Now think about it. At age four or five you began to learn from the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. By the time the students were finished at age ten, they would have had large portions of the scriptures memorized and the best of these students would have had all five books memorized.

At the next stage, the best students would go on to secondary school, which was called Beth Midrash, and there they would learn the oral interpretations of the scriptures. And by learning the oral interpretations, the students would learn how to make their own applications. And through the study at Beth Midrash, the students would memorize the entire Old Testament.

And finally the best of the best of the best students from Beth Midrash, well they would get permission to leave the family home and leave the family trade in order to follow a well known Rabbi.

The best of the best of these students, would go and they would find a Rabbi that they wanted to follow and the Rabbi would then sit with that student. And that Rabbi would then ask that student all sorts of questions. They would test the student on all of the things the student knew about the scriptures, and they would ask them questions about their interpretations of the scriptures.

You see, the Rabbi wanted to see if that student was good enough, if that student would be able to do what the Rabbi did.

And so when the Rabbi calls you, you follow him, you learn from him. You don't just go to class during the day and then come home and do homework. You become immersed in the Rabbi's world. You observe what he does. You learn from his teachings. You interpret the scriptures as the Rabbi interprets the scriptures. You begin to understand how the Rabbi sees the world AND you begin to make an impact on the world through his kind of teaching!

In the case of Jesus, we remember that Jesus handpicks his disciples, calling them from the family trade. Jesus calls out to Peter and his brother Andrew from the shores of Galilee. And what does he say?

Come follow me! And I will make you Fishers of Men!

You see Jesus makes a promise to them! He says follow me! I will teach you, I will show you, what it is like to fish for men! Which was an entirely appropriate thing to say to the brothers. They were fishermen after all. They had taken after their Father's trade, which in essence meant that they weren't the best of the best of the best at Beth Midrash. They were fishing with their father, but what Jesus was saying was, I think you can do what I do! Become my disciples!

3. To deny Christ, but to deny KNOWING somebody is the ultimate betrayal

And so when Peter and the disciples are gathered in the upper room with Jesus, when they're having what is now known as the last supper, they've followed Jesus for three straight years. They've seen him teach the crowds and the people. Jesus had taught them privately because they were in the inner circle. They've seen the miracles and they've heard Jesus teach in parables.

And so when the scriptures tell us that Jesus is having the last Supper with his disciples and he says this,

“This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written:

“I will strike the shepherd,

and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’

³² But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”

Matthew 26: 31-32

Hearing this would have been shocking and unthinkable not only for Peter but for all of the disciples. Think of it. If you had followed Jesus day in and day out, you’d be thinking to yourself, you know what? I’m pretty committed to the cause of Jesus.

And those feelings and sentiments were still strong, especially in Peter because when Judas finally leads to soldiers to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, how does he react? He reacted with violence! Peter even draws his sword and he cuts off the ear of the servant of the high priest! This was no peaceful arrest! The disciples it would seem would go to any lengths to protect Jesus.

But getting back to our lesson this morning, Peter continues on with the conversation by saying:

“Even if all fall away, I never will.” Matthew 26: 33

These were bold words, weren’t they? This was a promise that Peter made, but as we know, it was a promise that he couldn’t keep.

But Jesus knew what would happen later that night. And so he says it, he predicts what will happen to Peter by saying,

“Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” Matthew 26: 34

But Peter responds:

“Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same. Matthew 26: 35

When we read this passage we often think that Peter was the only one that made the promise of never leaving Jesus’ side and that it was only Peter that was guilty.

We know this passage as Peter’s Denial.

But what we fail to remember that it was ALL the disciples that made the same promise to Jesus. All of the disciples were in the same boat as Peter.

They ALL had spent three years with Jesus.

They ALL had seen all that miracles that Jesus performed and

They ALL had heard all the lessons that Jesus had taught.

And so when the time came when Jesus was being arrested by the Chief Priests, not one person stood beside Jesus. They had ALL forsaken Christ. They had ALL deserted him. There was no one left.

4. The good news of the Gospel is that there is restoration – Peter, do you love me?

If we read the scriptures and ended our lesson here, it would be pretty devastating.

But, the story doesn't end with the disciples scattering and leaving Jesus. But instead, the story continues with Christ dying on the cross and resurrecting on the third day!

And what about Peter and the rest of the disciples? How did their story continue on during that time?

We're told that after Jesus' resurrection, he went and found his disciples.

He could have said, "you know what?" You've proved your worth to me. When push comes to shove, you didn't have what it takes. You deserted me in my hour of need.

But the beautiful part of the story is that Jesus knew that his disciples already weren't good enough. They weren't supposed to BE disciples of a famous Rabbi.

And so in John Chapter 21, after the resurrection of Jesus, we read that Jesus is the one that goes to reconcile with Peter. Even though Peter was the one that betrayed Jesus, it was Jesus who was the one who looked for Peter to forgive him. In the scriptures we're told that after Jesus found Peter fishing, he had a meal with him. And after they had finished eating, Jesus asks Peter those famous questions:

"Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

¹⁶ Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

¹⁷ The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. "

In this passage we see that Jesus is gently restoring Peter. We can see how poetically Jesus does this as well. Just as Peter denies Jesus three times, Jesus takes the time and restores him by asking whether or not Peter loves him not once, not twice, but three times.

However, there is something even more hidden in the scriptures that the English translation doesn't capture for us. When we read the scriptures in Ancient Greek, we find that Jesus bends down and meets Peter where he really is.

What do I mean by that?

In the ancient Greek, when we read the passage from John, we see that the language that Jesus uses and the language that Peter uses

doesn't

match

up.

In the ancient Greek we read that Jesus says this to Peter:

“Simon (Peter), son of John, do you truly love me more than these?”

The word “love” that Jesus is using here is the word AGAPE – which means an “unconditional love”.

And what Jesus is asking Peter is, Peter do you “unconditionally love” me more than these – these being the fishing and the equipment and the occupation of being a fisherman.

And Peter answers Jesus by saying

“You know that I love you”

But the word “love” here is a different word that Peter uses. Peter uses the word “philo” here instead, which means “affection” or “brotherly love”. Jesus uses the word agape for “unconditional love”, but Peter answers him with the word for “brotherly love”. Does it mean that Peter doesn’t love Jesus unconditionally?

Some scholars believe that the reason why Peter answers Jesus with word for “brotherly love” is because Peter perhaps feels that the word “agape” might be too formal or cold for him. Peter loves Jesus like a brother does. Which is huge since I’m sure Peter is feeling uneasy and guilty because he had denied Christ in his loneliest hour.

Never the less Jesus presses on and he asks Peter a second time.

Jesus says, ***“Simon son of John, do you truly love me?”***

Once again, Jesus uses the word AGAPE here to pose the question.

And once again Peter answers him by saying, ***“Yes, Lord you know that I love you.”***

– Peter once again is saying the word PHILO and says, yes, you know that I love you like a brother.

Finally the third time Jesus asks Peter once more and says, ***“Do you love me?”*** But here the language that Jesus uses changes. And instead of using the word AGAPE, Jesus uses a derivative of the word PHILO. Jesus asks the question “Do you brotherly love me?” And why does he do that? Jesus recognizes that Peter isn’t

using the word AGAPE and so Jesus meets Peter and he restores him by meeting him with the word PHILO or brotherly love.

In his love and grace and mercy, Jesus recognizes that Peter is struggling with the word AGAPE and so he meets him by using the word PHILO. Jesus bends down in order to lift Peter up.

In one conversation, Jesus both forgives Peter and restores him. How beautiful is that? In the act of restoration and reconciliation, Jesus meets Peter where he is and builds him up. The Challenge of Broken promises is not about getting justice or what we deserve, it's about meeting people where they are.

That is the good news of the gospel my friends.

Jesus models this for us when he restores Peter. And we as Christ followers, we must do the same for others.

5. Application for us – talk is cheap, not denial, but action –

Friends, we live in a world that is filled with people making promises. Sometimes they are able to keep them, and sometimes they are not able to keep them. In the breaking of promises, we as human beings experience betrayal. And really we have two options when that happens.

The first option is to be furious and angry and not want anything to do with the other person. But in following this course of action we leave behind us a trail of broken relationships.

But the second option that we have is following Jesus' course of action.

And This is the challenge of the Broken Promise.

Remember, Jesus was the one that was wronged and hurt but HE was the one that went to reconcile with Peter and with his disciples. In following Christ, we are taught that WE must be the one that reaches out in order to RESTORE the relationship. Jesus cared less about who was right or wrong. Instead Jesus cared for the other person and so in the same way we must do the same.

Friends this is a hard teaching. This is the challenge of Broken Promises. To reach out to others when we are the ones that have experienced betrayal. But as Christ followers we must do this if we are to model to a broken world what the Kingdom of God is like. We must be the ones to take this kind of action.

Amen.