

Unbelievable Promises Genesis 17:1–7, 15–16 Lent 2B, 2-25-18

How many of you could run a marathon? That's 26.22 miles! I thought it was awesome that my son-in-law ran his first one with a small fracture in his foot that curtailed his training. And that was after swimming 2.4 miles and bicycling 112 miles in his first Iron Man race. His family agrees that it was also his last. Many do that, but for most of us, it is unbelievable.

But then I heard a man tell about how he ran his first marathon with just 80 days training, starting 40 pounds overweight. Unbelievably, that was in Antarctica at 3 degrees temperature. Amazing, huh? More unbelievable: That was just the first of seven marathons he ran on seven continents, in seven days with just 18 hours of sleep. His best time was his last one, under 4 hours. How is that even possible? He is one of only a few ever to do this, but the only one who was not already an experienced runner.

He is a man of faith who ran motivated by a worthy cause. Otherwise, this would be foolish and unsafe. He is running for elected office next month, so I won't say his name, lest you take this as an endorsement. He ran the races because of a promise to the mother of an 8-year-old boy dying of a rare cancer. His goal was to raise \$77,777.77 but he is over a \$250K to fulfill the boy's final wish: That not another child would die of cancer. If with God's strength he could keep that promise, how much more can God Himself keep His own promises.

It was unbelievable that a 100 year-old Abram and his 90-year-old wife Sarai could conceive and bear a child. But God promised they would and they did. God kept that promise for a good cause: not to show off his power, but to show his faithfulness to keep promises, even unbelievable ones.

Twenty-five years earlier, God had promised this son, through whom He would bless all nations of the world. Later God told Abram that his offspring, as numerous as the stars, would include many kings. One of them was and is the King of kings Jesus Christ.

Now Abram believed the promise, but did not leave it to God to fulfill it. Still childless, he and Sarai agree that he should have a child through her servant Haggai, and Ishmael was born.

But God promised a son through his wife Sarai. The child of promise, Isaac, would not be born by Abram's power, but by God's. Before keeping that promise he changed the name Abram "exalted father" to Abraham, the father of many nations; and Sarai, "princess" to Sarah, the mother of many.

To Abraham, God marked this promise with circumcision, a blood covenant that pointed to the blood of Christ, shed to atone for the sins of all who believe in him. Jesus was Abram's descendant promised to bless all nations of the world.

Today, God marks that promise to us in baptism. There he gives the blessings won in Christ's death and resurrection: forgiveness of sins and eternal life. There he gives us a new name also: Forgiven, Redeemed, Child of God. God also marks the blood covenant in the cup of Holy Communion together with His body given in the bread.

If God kept this unbelievable promise to Abraham for you and me, how much will he not also keep all these promises: "I will never leave you or forsake you." "All who call upon the Lord will be saved" "Come to me all who labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest." "Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you." "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."

The promises come to those who trust the promises of God and are surrendered to His way of keeping them. Unlike Abraham, we don't get impatient with God, taking shortcuts to His blessings and trying to keep His promises for Him. What God promises, He will deliver in his way and in his time.

The lesson of Abraham and Sarah cannot be clearer: God keeps his unbelievable promises--always has, always will, for you. Not just because He can, but also because he wants to, because He loves you.

The politician runner kept a promise for the purpose that not another child would die for cancer. It was an incredibly hard promise to keep. In Christ, God kept his promise that so that not one more child would die from the sickness of sin. That too was incredibly hard to keep as he endured the suffering of the cross and bore the weight of the world's sins. But He kept his promise for you, to you. Believe all the promises of God, even the unbelievable ones. Amen.