

Devotions for Friday, July 17, 2020  
*Bread for the Journey*  
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### *Keeping Promises*

*For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.*

Hebrews 6: 12-20

Children do it all the time. Entwining their little fingers they "pinky swear". With an "X" over their chest they "cross my heart and hope to die". Of course they only do such things when the issue is (in their minds) of supreme importance. That is when a promise requires a bigger gesture.

Oaths are important for adults as well. We too generally reserve them for the big promises that, in our world, have real life implications. We make an oath to the person we are promising to be faithful to for the rest of our lives. Young men and women raise a right hand and swear an oath to protect and defend the constitution when enlisting in the armed forces of the nation. A witness in a court affirms by an oath that what they will say in response to the questions asked will be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. All of those oaths are strengthened by the rule of law, with proscribed consequences for violating the promises made. Oaths should not be taken lightly.

The preacher behind the book of Hebrews (yes, "the preacher", as this book is understood to be a sermon sent to an unidentified Christian community in the first century) uses a lot of language and imagery that is quite foreign to us. That makes this a challenging sermon to read and understand. But every now and then something said by this preacher of old breaks through the distance of time and cultures and is crystal clear. In this reading from the daily lectionary that clarity is in these words, "*it is impossible for God to lie*".

God wants us to know that his promises can be trusted, so he makes an oath. Whenever life fills your days with broken promises, disappointments and challenges which seem insurmountable, remember that all is not lost. God's promises remain true, and God cannot lie. God's love for you does not lie. God's promise that in Christ you are forgiven is true this day. God's loving kindness and the peace it brings is a truth on which you can count, today and everyday.

Long ago the hymn writer Joachim Neander put it this way,

*All my hope on God is founded who will all my trust renew,  
who through change and chance will guide me, only good and only true,  
God unknown, God alone, call my heart to be thine own.*  
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Gracious God, aid me in opening my heart to you, trusting that you will fill it only with faith, hope and love, for you are truehearted, and keep your word. Amen.