

**The MESSAGE for December 18, 2011****Luke 1:26-38*****Promise in our Impossibilities*****The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller**

Emily is in tears. At 27-years-old she felt like her life was over. Five years in an abusive marriage was enough. She finally got enough courage to pack up her two young children with few things in a couple of suitcases, hopped on a bus and traveled 500 miles away to another city hoping to start a new life.

But starting a new life isn't easy. She can't find a job. Friends who said they would help turned their backs on her. Her money runs out. Her children are sick and miserable. She has no home, no food, no friends, no hope. As she wanders aimlessly down the sidewalk on a gray, dreary, rainy day, she passes by a church. Emily reads the sign out front, "God is faithful and able."

It's been a long, long time since Emily set foot inside a church, and now she remembers why. *Faith is a myth. It's all a bunch of empty promises. God hasn't been faithful to me.* She mutters to herself.

Ever been there? Ever felt hopeless? Ever find yourself trapped in a seemingly impossible situation? If you have, then perhaps you know how hard it is to trust God, to trust that God is faithful. And yet, the witness of God's people through the ages reveals God's love is steadfast and God's promises are sure.

David found that to be true. David was a shepherd, the youngest of eight boys. In the world of the Old Testament, that meant David was at the bottom of the family pecking order and at the bottom of the social order too. And yet, God chose David to be the king of Israel. And then God made an outrageous promise that a descendent from David's family line, from his gene pool, would sit on the throne of Israel forever. That's quite a God promise!

God's faithfulness is even more extraordinary. At first, David does quite well as king. He leads the nation of Israel into a time of peace and prosperity like never before. But the success goes to his head. He begins to make some really bad moral and ethical decisions. He has an affair with another man's wife and gets her pregnant. David tries to cover it up instead of coming clean. When that fails, he has her husband murdered. Oh.... no.....

This is the one that God called to be king, the one through whom God promised an everlasting kingdom. David's gene pool seems more like a cesspool. Surely David's actions will negate God's promise. And yet, God's love is steadfast and God's promises are sure.

Have you ever been burned by someone's failed promise? I'm guessing that if you are alive and breathing, you've experienced the pain of a broken promise in one way or another.

- You went "all in" on a business deal, only to discover that you'd been swindled.
- You promised the love of your life "till death do you part," only to be abandoned.
- You were promised a promotion or a raise at work, only to find yourself unemployed.
- Promises, promises, promises... broken, broken, broken...

For some people, every time we experience the pain of a broken promise, we find it more difficult to trust, especially to trust God. As we consider the witness of God's people through the ages we can see that God's love is steadfast and God's promises are sure.

Mary found that to be true. Here is a young woman who finds herself in an impossible situation. Imagine being a girl, 14 or 15 years old, living in a small town like Myerstown, when suddenly an angel appears to you. That would be strange enough, but then the angel makes this outrageous promise saying: "God is with you. You are favored by the Lord. Even though you are a virgin, you will conceive a child, and not just any child. This child will be called Jesus, the Son of God."

Can you imagine?

What will her parents think?

What will the neighbors say?

How will she explain this to Joseph, her fiancé?

How can any of this be possible?

The angel reassures her saying: "For nothing will be impossible with God."

What would you do? How would you respond, based on all the broken promises in your life? What would you do? Mary responds: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

God delivers. God makes good on God's promises. Mary gives birth to Jesus, the Son of God. And by doing so, God makes good on the promise to David so many years before. Jesus comes from David's gene pool.

Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of lords, the ruler over Israel, the ruler over all creation. One day Jesus will rule over every human heart. One day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God. One day everyone will see that because of Jesus God's love is steadfast and God's promises are sure.

Perhaps you feel like you are in an impossible situation of some kind, struggling to believe that tomorrow can be any better than today. The joy of Christmas is all around, but joy is not something you are feeling right now because of something going on in your life.

If that's you then I want to proclaim to you what God's people have been saying for thousands of years: God's love is steadfast and God's promises are sure. You are not alone. God has not abandoned you.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of the Christ child, we celebrate the One who is faithful, the One whose love is steadfast and sure, the One who is already at work in our lives in ways we cannot comprehend, the One who will never, ever let us go. God has made an everlasting promise to each one of us.

Emily continues her aimless walk down the sidewalk on that rainy, grey day when she feels a hand on her shoulder. She turns to find a woman, about her mother's age, wearing a yellow rain coat. "Are you okay, sweetheart?" the woman asks. "It's a terrible day to be out walking. We have hot soup and fresh bread for lunch inside the church. Why don't you and your children come in and join us?"

Any other time Emily would have just kept walking. Maybe it's the gnawing hunger in her stomach and the thought of a hot meal. Maybe it's the thought of being inside, where it's warm and dry. Truth is something in that woman's eyes, something in her voice touched Emily. There's a genuineness in those eyes. There's a concern in that voice; things that Emily haven't experienced in long, long time.

She finds herself sitting at a table slurping down hot soup. Her children are dry and safe – being fed and loved by half a dozen new grandmothers.

In the church Emily pours out her pain and struggles to a sympathetic ear as her children sleep safely in the nursery. She talks about the abuse in her past, her failure to start a new life, and the hopelessness she feels about the future.

Emily is in tears. The woman who met her on the sidewalk takes Emily's hands and says, "Honey, you're not alone. God is faithful and able. Together, we're going see you through."

Emily is hopeful for the first time in a long, long time. For her in the church on that day by God's grace she started living a new life. Amen.