

## Promises

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, Year B, February 4, 2024

Scout Sunday at St. Matthew's, Sunbury and Blessing of Candles

Isaiah 40:21-31; Psalm 147:1-12, 21c

1 Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39

The Reverend Dina Carter Ishler, Priest in Charge

*In the name of God~ Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.*

First of all~ we are so glad that you- our Scouts, your leaders, and your families- are here for Scout Sunday! We love this chance to spend a Sunday morning with you. You are an important part of our community, and you are always welcome here at St. Matthew's in everything we do.

I have been thinking about the Scout Oath and Law all week as I looked forward to hearing you say them today. It struck me that these are really promises- you're not promising that you'll always do them perfectly and never make mistakes or need to try again, but you're

promising that you'll do your best. In the Scout oath you pledged (which is like a promise) to do your duty to God and to help other people in every possible way- physically, mentally, morally, and faithfully. And the Scout Law has those twelve points- twelve ways of being, really, that are so necessary to the health and wholeness of our world- that are described as goals for every Scout- they are not easy, the Law says, but a Scout always tries. Again, I heard them as a kind of promise- the promise to be faithful to these worthy goals even- especially- when it feels the hardest.

In our service today, you heard four different readings from Holy Scripture, or the Word of God. Scripture has one overarching purpose: to tell the story of how, since the world was created, God has always wanted all of us to know God's healing mercy and love- for us to learn through these stories about the nature of God so that we might come to know God more deeply. I was amazed,

when thinking about today's readings, how they also speak so clearly about promises- promises about who God is that we can hold close and allow their wisdom to guide us.

In today's first reading, the prophet Isaiah assumes that the power and majesty of God is something his listeners should already know, from their own experience and the stories they have heard: "Have you not seen? Have you not been told from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?" Isaiah describes God as "great in strength, mighty in power, no one is missing, he calls everything in creation by name. The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth...he gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless. Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles." And from today's psalm, psalm 147: The Lord heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds,

counts the number of the stars and again, we hear that ***God calls them all by name.***” Imagine how many trillions of stars there are in all the galaxies- if they are known and named by God than surely we are as well. And God’s care extends to all parts of our natural world: He prepares rain for the earth; he makes grass to grow upon the mountains and green plants to serve humankind.” All that is true and good can only come from God, who is not impressed by our own attempts at strength or control but delights in the awe, the honor, the praise that we offer back to God. The apostle Paul teaches us that the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus is for all people, that it is a message we can make known to everyone- regardless of their own life stories and the ways that they are different from ours we can tell it in a way that they will understand.

And today’s Gospel is full of the beautiful promise that Jesus, God’s son, dwells with us in all the spaces of our lives- not only in our public places of worship like

churches, but in our homes, seeing us when we are sick in bed- like the woman in this story- and wanting to heal us. God longs for us to be free from whatever hurts our souls and our bodies, from whatever separates us from God's love, for us to know that prayer is both rejuvenation and refuge from the hardness of this world (as it was for Jesus) and a way to know God ever more deeply. We know that these are promises we can rely on, because we hear them in our scripture stories and we believe that scripture was inspired by the Holy Spirit and still speaks to us today, guiding us to seek ever more deeply its meaning for our own lives.

God, of course, is different than us. We struggle to keep our promises, no matter how much we may want to, because we are human beings and far from perfect. When we are tired, or disappointed, or angry, or maybe we don't feel our best, it can be hard to remember we have promised to live a certain way and be faithful to that. It

can also be hard to remember that God has promised to give us what we need, that the strength and courage and wisdom we pray for to live honestly and faithfully have been freely given to us- but we know *that God always keeps God's promises and wants nothing more than that we live as if we believe this is true.*

And so my invitation to all of us, but especially our Scouts who try so valiantly to live up to the Scout Law and Oath, is to remember there is one greater than us who always keeps his promises and who can be relied on to bless us with everything we need to live this kind of life. I love this quote from today's reading from Isaiah: *“Even youths will faint and be weary, but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”*

May it ever be so, **Amen.**

## For reference:

### **The Scout Oath**

On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law; to help other people at all times; to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight.

### **The Scout Law**

The Scout Law has 12 points. Each is a goal for every Scout. A Scout tries to live up to the Law every day. It is not always easy to do, but a Scout always tries.

### **A Scout is:**

**TRUSTWORTHY.** Tell the truth and keep promises. People can depend on you.

**LOYAL.** Show that you care about your family, friends, Scout leaders, school, and country.

**HELPFUL.** Volunteer to help others without expecting a reward.

**FRIENDLY.** Be a friend to everyone, even people who are very different from you.

**COURTEOUS.** Be polite to everyone and always use good manners.

**KIND.** Treat others as you want to be treated. Never harm or kill any living thing without good reason.

**OBEDIENT.** Follow the rules of your family, school, and pack. Obey the laws of your community and country.

**CHEERFUL.** Look for the bright side of life. Cheerfully do tasks that come your way. Try to help others be happy.

**THRIFTY.** Work to pay your own way. Try not to be wasteful. Use time, food, supplies, and natural resources wisely.

**BRAVE.** Face difficult situations even when you feel afraid. Do what you think is right despite what others might be doing or saying.

**CLEAN.** Keep your body and mind fit. Help keep your home and community clean.

**REVERENT.** Be reverent toward God. Be faithful in your religious duties. Respect the beliefs of others.