

Good morning! This is Sunny Ahn, the Senior Pastor at Kona United Methodist Church. I am glad that you are with us this morning. Let me start today's message with a short story.

[Story] A politician visited a remote village and asked the inhabitants what the government could do for them. "We have two big needs," said the village headman. "First, we have a hospital but no doctor." The politician pulled out his cellphone, spoke for a while and then said, "I have sorted it out. A doctor will arrive here tomorrow. What is your other need?" The village headman replied, "Well, we have no cellphone reception at all in our village."

++++

It seems as though I have heard a lot of promises lately. Oh, yes, it is an election year, isn't it? I hope that all of us have figured out that "almost" all of the promises we hear from political candidates (whatever their political party) are empty words. In many instances, the candidates promise different things to different people, knowing that they cannot deliver. In a few instances, by the way, the candidates may actually think that they can deliver, but chances are they will not. The challenge in keeping the promises is not only a challenge for the politicians. It is also for many of us.

Oaths or solemn promises are what insecure, fallible human beings expect from other sinful, fallible human beings in order to have confidence in a promise. There is a natural human tendency to be suspicious of another person's word. Oaths are meant to add an extra layer of reassurance that we're telling the truth. Of course, if a person is fundamentally honest, then there is no purpose to such a vow, other than to make the other person feel better. Hebrews 6:17-18 are exactly why chooses, at times, to use the concept of an oath when dealing with humanity—the humanity during the desperate, troubled times that they were experiencing and the troubled times that lay ahead of them with not much of hope.

Our world in the year 2020 doesn't seem to be offering us much in the way of hope these days. Out of nowhere, we find our world turned upside down and inside out by this coronavirus pandemic. When we turn on the news, we hear fighting, finger

pointing...our leaders playing the blame game and partisan politics. Of course, this is nothing new. There was plenty of fighting and finger point before this pandemic hit ... left versus right ... Republicans versus Democrats ... conservatives versus liberals ... black versus white ... gays versus straights ... and, of course, the government versus the media.

All of this fighting and name-calling and shouting and finger-pointing all of the time ... well, it can make us feel uneasy ... anxious ... uncertain ... insecure ... maybe even fearful, am I right? It creates a chronic sense of hopelessness and helplessness. Have you felt it? I mean ... even before the pandemic, there was a sagging sense of growing despair in the heart of the humanity.

I think that the poet and author Dorothy Sayers beautifully captured this growing sense of despair that has been creeping into our collective psyche when she wrote: "In the world it is called 'Tolerance' but in Hell it's called 'Despair' ... the sin that believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing ... and remains alive because there is nothing worth dying for." Wow!

While I don't believe that it's gotten that bad yet, I do believe that if we're not careful, if things don't change, we could end up in the kind of "despair" that Ms. Sayer described ... believing in nothing, caring for nothing, seeking nothing, enjoying nothing, hating nothing, living for nothing, and living only because there's nothing worth dying for.

Right now, I believe that we are at a point of just being chronically dissatisfied. Perhaps the true source of despair and hopelessness among so many people today is simply the recognition or growing awareness that life is just not what it ought to be or what we hoped, it would be ... that some of the things which promised satisfaction and joy have not delivered on their promises. And the result is a pervasive sense of uneasiness ... like an itch that just cannot be scratched...an irritating sense of frustration that comes from reaching for that undefinable something that is somehow always just beyond our reach. Do you know what I'm talking about?

So we chase ... but we never quite arrive. We go after this ... and when that fails to satisfy that itch, we go after something else ... and then something else ... and then something else ... and the more we chase and the more we fail, the more we become jaded and frustrated. It leaves us feeling hopeless and helpless. More and

more people are feeling like there's nothing that they can do that will make a difference in their lives, in the world, and it leaves them feeling more and more frustrated and more and more hopeless and helpless. Maybe you're one of those people ... maybe not ... but I'm willing to bet that we all know someone who feels like that ... probably more than one.

Well, guess what?! I have good news. The problem is not a lack of hope or the absence of hope. Trust me. Humans are very hopeful creatures. Hope is at the very core of our essence, our existence. It's a critical part of who we are as human beings. Science, medicine, and human experience have proven time after time again that we, human beings, simply cannot exist without hope. Hope is the very "stuff" of life. Believe it or not, my siblings in Christ, the problem is not hope. To hope is human. The problem is not the absence or lack of hope but what we put our hope in.

The author of Hebrews, today's scripture, tells us to put our hope in the promises of God, the oath God has made with us. An oath is sacred not only during the biblical times, but also our current life. To take an oath is to swear that what has been promised is true, binding all parties by this vow. We even have notaries who mark their seal on the oath certifying the vow. In the legal system willingly giving false information when making an affidavit is the crime of perjury. In other words, making an oath is sacred and guarantees the oath taker's honesty and integrity in the matter under question.

When God made the promise to Abraham that he would have a son, make him into a great nation and the Messiah would come through his line, since there was no one greater than God for God to swear by, He swore by Himself on oath (Hebrews 6:13). He vowed the promise to Abraham would come to pass. He did this to show the unchanging nature of His promise. Meaning every blessing would be fulfilled and the promise would never be revoked. Even today we live under the blessings of this vow made to Abraham.

Amazingly both of these things, the promise and the oath, will always exist together because they are tied to God's nature and integrity. Just like water, both hydrogen and oxygen must be present together, otherwise it is just elements, not substance. The oath made to Abraham makes it impossible for God to lie, prove false or deceive us. This is because the oath rests on the character of God. In fact, since the world was spoken into existence by God and it is held together by His word of power (Genesis 1; John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:2-3). If God

lied, the world would cease to exist because His Word holds all things together. If God were ever proved false, His Word would be broken and there would be no power to sustain the universe. Which is why He confirmed His promise to Abraham with an oath. The stakes were incredibly high and He wanted to show the unchanging nature of His promise. What He said would come to pass.

We can draw strong encouragement from this since we too live under the blessing promised to Abraham. Everything God has said, has come to pass. Even in the midst of the trials of this world we have a hope that is unparalleled by any other. This hope in God's unbreakable promise is the anchor of our life (Hebrews 6:19-20). In the midst of life, we can rest securely knowing that our future is secured, our hope sure and our God faithful.

The author of Hebrews reminds us once again that God is trustworthy and faithful. In fact, He is the Ultimate Promise Keeper! He has never made a promise that was ever broken. He can be trusted to do what He has said. His promises are absolutely certain to be carried on to completion because He cannot lie. "Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of His purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, He confirmed it with an oath. ¹⁸God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged" (Hebrews 6:17-18, MSG).

God always keeps His Word, my siblings in Christ! Has He made you a promise? Then, He will keep it. Hold strong to His promises and do not lose hope in God or put your hope in other than our God! Trust that in His time and in His way His promises will come to pass. Nothing, nothing at all is impossible for Him and He cannot lie; so if He has made a promise to you that you can know, without a shadow of a doubt, that it will happen; God is faithful!

Our God is the promise keeper. If God promises it, it will happen. It's only a matter of time. God has promised that God will love us unconditionally (Romans 8:28-29). God will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). God has redeemed us and given us eternal life in Christ Jesus (John 3:16). God has a plan for us—the plan to prosper us and not to harm us, the plan to give us hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11). Let us stand firmly in the promises of God! Amen.