

He could tell I was about to change my mind about whatever it was I'd told him we would do. My *then* small child looked up at me, screwed up his little face and said, "But you promised!"

Now, whatever it was, I'm not sure whether I promised, pinky-swore, crossed my heart and hoped to die, or made a solemn vow to do it. What mattered was that I was about to betray my kid's trust. He had me. Dead to rights. And I knew it. Therefore, we did whatever it was I said we were going to do. It could have had something to do with ice cream, or a trip to the zoo, or reading a book. It could have been something more serious. I don't know. I just remember that little face.

You promised. You gave your word. I trusted you.

In a little while, we're going to renew five promises to God and to each other. They are all promises that are impossible to keep. Impossible, if not for God's help.

Why do we do such a thing? Promise the impossible?

We promise because each person needs to take these vows seriously, to understand their importance, and realize that in living them out, each one of us will be transformed for the common good. We promise because in doing so we acknowledge the necessity of community. We not only need God to help us fulfill these promises, we need each other as well. Finally, we promise so that we can become the disciples and the baptismal community that Jesus wants us to be.

To be a disciple of Jesus, one needs:

- To actively participate in the community handed down to us by the apostles.
- To acknowledge one's imperfections and the constant need to re-direct one's life to be in line with the ideals Jesus demonstrated.
- To know the gospel story so well that you can share it in word and deed.
- To have the discipline to find the person Christ loves in each person one meets, including the one in the mirror, and respond to that divinity with love.
- To work to make earth the Beloved Community Jesus envisioned.

A Baptismal Community, first and foremost, is one that raises disciples up to know their gifts. It empowers, through prayer and formation, disciples to use those gifts to make a just society. It passes along wisdom to the next generations with thanksgiving and love.

Several years ago, I asked you all at the Annual Meeting to begin focusing on becoming disciples. We have taken baby steps in that direction. Today, I'm asking you to go from baby steps to strides. Why? It's not for our survival's sake. Yes, we want more people in the pews – but not because we want their money.

Redeemer's community has what they need for their survival.

We have hope. We have joy. We have healing.

We have relationships that are rooted in our faith in God.

Therefore, I'm challenging all of you to become a better disciple so that we, as the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer, may become a better community and example for our neighbors near and far.

I challenge you to

- Prioritize your family's life so that it includes Sunday worship. And, in order to make that happen more easily, we will launch a third service on Sunday afternoons on March 1st.
- Get acquainted with each other by hosting or participating in a foyer dinner group. Don't have a big space to entertain? Redeemer does. Use the church parish hall. Just call and schedule the time.
- Commit to studying scripture and other theological subjects. The more we learn, the greater our faith in God. Parents: your children's religious education is your responsibility. Redeemer is here to help you learn so that you feel comfortable teaching the next generation of Christians. I would love to see everyone in this church this morning participating in a Bible study or spiritual direction group, here or in your home.
- Take on a ministry behind the scenes. There are many ministries that have seen participation dwindle in the last 3 years. I'm specifically talking about altar guild, gardening chores, coffee hour, and tidying up. Getting involved with these tasks helps you become grounded in service to God and to the

community. These could be activities an entire family gets involved with! I realize it's a bit optimistic, but if 7 families would commit to mow the lawn this summer, we could lower our bill from the landscape company by thousands of dollars. The same would be true if we had a Monday or Friday housekeeping ministry. Something to think about.

- While this may be difficult, I challenge you to let go of a ministry you've done "forever" and train someone new to take your place. You have had the privilege of holding in your hearts the institutional narrative. You now have the responsibility to pass it along to the next generations. All ministries need a transition plan. This ensures that more than one person is familiar with a ministry and it keeps people from burning out. We need to practice good stewardship of our time and talent.
- Redeemer is a community to be shared! Each one of you needs to invite at least one person to church this year. Invite them to Sunday services. Invite them to Foyer Groups. Have them accompany you to a concert. Bring them with you to Collar & Coffee. Ask them to tag along with a youth group activity. There are people everywhere who are searching for God and a place that will help them find and be found by God. We should want more people to know what we know – that God's love is for everyone. Help people belong first. We'll get to the believing later.

- Consider joining fellow parishioners as they participate in ministries throughout Bethesda and beyond. You can do this with your time, talent, or treasure. Bring food for the Manna baskets. Toiletries for Bethesda Cares. Knit or crochet hats and scarves for homeless folks at Street Church. Come to liturgical events where offerings are designated for organizations like Episcopal Relief and Development, Samaritan Ministry of Greater Washington, or Sustainable Villages in Honduras.
- Attend gatherings meant to communicate the needs of the poor to people in power. Write letters to our elected officials. Pray for the people who benefit from these actions while you are doing them. Concentrate on *doing* justice. The bishop has asked each of the new deaneries to work on justice issues together. By working together, we make more powerful statements of our desires to see God's will be done.

There is one special challenge I ask that we address this year: the accessibility of this building and its programs for people with disabilities. Two events in 2019 (both funerals) made it quite clear that work must be done on Redeemer's physical plant to ensure that people with mobility limitations are truly welcome here. These strides will help us welcome expectant moms and children as well.

Addressing this challenge will also help us address our “front door problem” – the fact that people who don’t know us yet don’t know how to find their way inside.

When we get downstairs later this morning, please take a moment and complete the forms that you will find on the tables. It provides a checklist of ministries that need your time and talent. These ministries are necessary for your formation as a disciple of Jesus. Please indicate what you will commit to over the next year. Tell the staff what you need to help accomplish it. As your Chief Spiritual Officer, I promise I will do everything possible to help you take the next steps in your faith journey.

It took my son’s scrunched up little face to remind me that I had a responsibility to keep my promises. He looked up to me and trusted me. How could I let him down?

Friends, make the words you say today more than rote recitation. Make these promises. Live these promises. God is here with us to make the impossible possible. This parish depends upon it.

In 2020, we must become and BE the church God wants and trusts us to be.

Amen.