

## **The Promise**

*January 10, 2010*

(Epiphany 1 – Year C)

Isaiah 43: 1-7

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

As most of you all know, in adult Sunday school, we are beginning a six-week series based on Max Lucado's book called *Fearless*.

Through this book by Max Lucado, we are looking at our various fears and how to address those fears with a new discovery of God's faithful promises to us.

This study was first suggested to me by one of our church members, Tracy Kelly. And Tracy and I both believed that a study about fear is a super topic, because it seems that fear plays such a big part in our every day lives.

The Holy Spirit has definitely aligned our scripture readings this morning with our Sunday school topic of dealing with our fears.

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah speaks God's promise, saying:

“Do not fear.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.

And through rivers, they will not overwhelm you.

When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned.

Do not fear.

For I am with you.”

Did I ever tell you all that I am a graduate of the University of Texas?

I had last Thursday night all planned out in my mind.

For those who do not know what happened last Thursday night, the University of Texas Longhorns played in the National Championship football game against Alabama.

So last Thursday night, our family gathered to eat chips and queso in front of the fireplace while we watched the big game on TV.

In my mind, I had it all planned out - that the star quarterback for Texas, Colt McCoy, would play the last game of his stellar college career on that field of the Rose Bowl.

And I bet that Colt McCoy had it all planned out, too.

But just a few minutes into the football game, Texas was dominating the Alabama defense.

Then Colt McCoy ran the football on a keeper - and he was hit on his shoulder, sending him to the locker room, suffering from a pinched nerve.

The injury took Colt out of commission for the rest of the game.

Texas fought hard, but ended up losing the game.

It was definitely not the game I had planned on watching.

It might sound silly to some of you, but over the last few days since that National Championship Game, I have been kind of out of sorts and a bit down.

Of course, I wanted the Longhorns to win.

I can't deny that.

But I have been a Longhorn fan for a long time, through many ups and downs: many wins, many losses.

So I am not really that upset that we lost the game.

I am probably more out of sorts that things did not go as planned.

In Max Lucado's book, *Fearless*, he asks us to look honestly at our fears.

And when I took a look at my emotions,

When I did a gut-check on my feelings this last week,

I realized that I have a fear of the unplanned.

Many of us fear the unplanned.

When the phone rings at 3am and a voice on the other end says:

"Mom, it's me - I've been in an accident."

Then we fear the unplanned.

When we sit down in our boss' office and hear:

"It has nothing to do with your performance, we just had to make some cuts."

Then we fear the unplanned.

When the doctor says:

"The X-rays show a spot on your lung."

Then we fear the unplanned.

And to those of us who fear the unplanned, this is where God's promise, spoken by the prophet Isaiah, comes to you and me as good news.

God says:

“Do not fear.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.

And through rivers, they will not overwhelm you.

When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned.

Do not fear.

For I am with you.”

God promises us that when things do not work out as you planned, do not be afraid.

Do not be afraid - because God is with you.

Things did not work out for Jesus according to our plan, either.

As we heard in the Gospel story this morning, Jesus' ministry began with a spectacular bang at his baptism.

Then Jesus began inviting fishermen and IRS agents, of all people, to be in his army of change.

Jesus started healing foreigners and eating dinner with hookers, getting him into hot water with the religious types.

Hookers and wetbacks were not a part of our plan.

Jesus supposed to have been the promised savior.

Yet when Jesus wouldn't kick the Romans' behind, things were not going according to plan.

Then the final straw was when Jesus stayed quiet and let the Romans kill him by nailing him to a cross.

Things were *definitely* not going according to plan.

Yet in all these unplanned moments, Jesus was not afraid.

He was not afraid because he had faith, faith that his God and Father was with him.

And Jesus promises us, he *promises* us, that our God and Father will be with us, as well.

This morning, we are baptizing two young girls: Dana Burton and Rachel Merchant.

And we can pretty much guarantee that their lives are not going to go as planned.

However, after these girls walk through the waters of baptism, then I will make the sign of the cross on their forehead in oil and I will say this promise:

“You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ’s own forever.”  
And then they, too, will be children of the Promise, just like we are children of the Promise.

If you notice carefully, God does not promise us that there will be no unplanned moments in this life, because

God gives us the gift of free will and of choices.

God gives us the gift of failure and of mistakes that help us to grow.

God gives us the gift of a human body that will eventually wear out and die.

But what God *does* promise us is that

When you wade through the deep waters of a late night car accident, then you will not be alone.

God *does* promise us that

When you swim through the rivers of layoffs and unemployment, then you will not be alone.

God *does* promise us that

When you walk through the fire of cancer, then you will not be alone.

God *does* promise us that

When things are not going according to your plan,  
Then you will not be alone.

At the end of the National Championship Game on Thursday night, Alabama celebrated and cheered, as they should.

And Colt McCoy, the quarterback who was knocked out of the game so unfairly, was interviewed on national TV, about his disappointment.

And this is what Colt McCoy said about his unplanned moment:

“I always give God the glory.  
I never question why things happen the way they do.  
God is in control of my life.  
And I know that if nothing else, I am standing on the Rock.”

Maybe the reason why I have felt so out of sorts in these last few days is not  
because of my fears.  
Maybe it is because of my faith.

Do *I* believe the Promise?  
Do you?  
Do *you* believe the Promise?

AMEN.

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