

WEEKLY SERMON

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Promises, Promises!

A question ... what promises do you make in life? What promises do you make with regard to your family, your working life, or personally to yourself? And how do those promises affect the way you live and work?

In Mark's Gospel (chapter 14 verse 27-31) the Apostle Peter makes a profound claim about his loyalty to Jesus. As they stand on the Mount of Olives, Jesus begins to prepare his disciples for his impending crucifixion and the reality that all will abandon him. Horrified, Peter exclaims "Even though all become deserters "I will never deny you." Gently, Jesus pushes back and predicts that before the cock crows twice Peter would deny him three times! Again, Peter states clearly "I will never deny you!"

How often do we say things and fail to carry them through? How often do we say things, and because of extenuating circumstances fail to deliver on promises made or commitments agreed?

More often than not, when we break our promises or fail to deliver on commitments it's because fear creeps in and we worry that we will be pilloried or anxious that we will be marginalised. Our natural human reaction is to allow self-interest to kick in and we transition into self-protection mode.

Holding onto our integrity at such times can be difficult. Indeed, holding onto our integrity can be one of the biggest challenges we will ever face in life. But holding on to what we believe, keeping the promises we have made or following through on commitments agreed is, in many ways, a reflection on who we are and what matters to us.

Last week, I attended the National Cathedrals Conference in Newcastle under the title "Different Country: Different church". The keynote address was given by Sir John Major who spoke about the shared challenges that face both the church and the country. One phrase spoken stood out for me, he said "It may be unfashionable to speak of values, but it should not be. They should never be cast aside."

One of the characteristics of Christian faith is the grace of forgiveness. When we get things wrong and confess our failure, God is faithful and forgiving, restoring us to a right relationship with him and others. We see this act of forgiveness and reinstatement beautifully extended by Jesus at the end of John's Gospel (chapter 21 verse 15-19).

The Christian life is so often made up of aspiration and failure – the making of promises and breaking of promises. But the good news of the gospel is that in Jesus, our failures can be transformed and our lives changed when we refuse to deny Jesus, hold on to our integrity and embrace with confidence the values of God's Kingdom and stick to them!

The Very Revd. Peter Howell-Jones. Dean of Blackburn

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