

## **“God is Faithful”**

Date: Dec. 20, 2015

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: Isaiah 49:8-10, 13, 15-16a

Theme: Faithfulness

Occasion: Advent 4, Under Wraps series

It’s really painful to be forgotten or left behind. Ask my daughter who waited for her Dad to pick her up after school one day, in elementary school. He forgot he was supposed to get her that day. As a young girl, I can only imagine how frightened she must have been. We joke about it now, but she wasn’t laughing then.

It hurts, when people break their promise to you. A trusted friend no longer calls any more. Your boss assures you that this company is just like family, but then there’s a down turn in the market. He lays you off and says, “It’s just business; don’t take it personally.”

The pain of marital infidelity is excruciating. Short of that, many marriages turn bitter or cold when one partner or the other says, “I don’t love you anymore.” It makes you wonder if all those vows and promises you made at one time ever meant anything at all.

The pain we suffer when we’ve been forgotten, left behind, betrayed or rejected can rock us to the core. It makes us wonder about ourselves. It makes us wonder if we can ever trust other people again. We might even question if God is trustworthy. After all, where is God in the midst of our pain and broken relationships?

The whole story of the Bible tells us that God is faithful. Going all the way back to Abraham, God made a covenant to be our God. Covenant is a word that is used often in the Bible, but it’s a word that is never used lightly. It is reserved for formal agreements of a most

serious nature. It involves elaborate oaths and vows that must be taken. Christian marriage is a covenant, a covenantal relationship.

A covenant is not a contract. A contract says, “If you do something for me, I will do something for you; but if you fail to live up to your part of the bargain, I no longer have to fulfill my part of the deal.”

The biblical notion of covenant is altogether different. It is a commitment to fulfill an oath, *even if* the other person fails to live up to their end of the agreement.

Now, if you’re entering into a business agreement, you want to get a contract. You don’t want to pay someone for services rendered if they don’t do what they promised. But when you’re building a home, a marriage, you want a covenant.

You don’t want a marriage contract that says “If you love me, *then* I’ll love you back. I will love you *only if* you love me.” Or, “I’ll only love you if you’re easy to love, or as long as you make me happy.”

No! You want a marriage covenant that says, “I will love, honor and cherish you, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part.”

If you see your marriage as a contract, the question is always, “Am I getting what I was *promised?*” But when you see your marriage as a covenant, then the question becomes, “Am *I* giving what *I* promised.” With a contract, you’re looking to see if the other person is holding up their end of the bargain. But in a covenant, you’re looking at what you promised them.

Our God is not a contract-God. Our God is not an “I will love you as long as you make me happy” – kind of God. He’s not an “I will

love you as long as you do everything right” - kind of God, or an “I will love as you long as you don’t fail me,” - kind of God. That’s not our God. Our God is not a contract God. Our God is a covenant God.

Ours is a God who says, “I will remain true even if you are false. I will remain faithful even if you are unfaithful. I will continue to love you even if you don’t love me back.”

Our God is a “for-better-or-for-worse” kind of God. When God made the covenant with Abraham, he promised, “I will love you and I will be faithful to you, even if it kills me.”

Sadly, unfortunately, God’s people did not hold up their end of the covenant. The whole story of the Old Testament could be summarized as a series of events when God’s people would be unfaithful, God would forgive them and restore the relationship, and before too long they would break the covenant again.

Over and over again they would test God’s love and faithfulness. As soon as they left Egypt with Moses, they began to grumble about how God was not providing for them. They made a golden calf and worshipped it, instead of the Lord.

For centuries God would call His people back to faithfulness, obeying His laws and commandments. For a period of time they would be faithful, but then they would turn their backs on the Lord God. God sent prophet after prophet to get them to return to the covenant He had made with his people.

The story of the Old Testament is a love story, of a faithful God and an unfaithful people. God could easily have gotten fed up with His people. He could have said, “I’ve had it with you. I’ve given all I could. I’ve loved you as long as I can love you. But now, enough is

enough.” And, simply walked away. But He didn’t. Our God is a God who says, “I will not forget my love for you, no matter what you do. Even though you walk away from me, I will remain true and faithful.”

So what does all of that have to do with Christmas? We celebrate the birth of a baby, his young mother, the shepherds who came to visit and the wise men who brought gifts. But God has always known that Christmas is about something bigger than that.

Christmas is about keeping a promise. Christmas is about being faithful. You see, the baby who was born on Christmas day was not a teacher, a healer a counselor or a prophet. Yes, Jesus was all of those things. But when the angel had to pick one title for the baby, the most important one, the one that would give us God’s *why* for Christmas, he said, “A *Savior* has been born to you.”

Jesus was born to be a Savior, and Christmas was God’s plan to bring him into the world. Why? - Because we desperately need a Savior. We can’t keep the terms of the covenant on our own, so God made a way to fulfill his covenant to us.

You see, we were lost in our sins. We had rebelled against God’s love but he became incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ, to show us the depths of His love and faithfulness.

The good news of great joy that comes to us at Christmas is that God has made a way, and the way is Jesus. Jesus took our place, suffered our punishment and made atonement for our sins.

I need a Savior. You need a Savior. Joseph and Mary, the shepherds and the wise men needed a Savior. It’s why Jesus came – to fulfill the covenant, to keep God’s promise. God so loved the world that He sent His Son.

Jesus came into this world to bear our sorrows and griefs, and to bear our sins. He came to die for us and to pay a price that we could not pay. We could not redeem ourselves; we could not break the hardness of our own hearts. We couldn't solve the sin problem by ourselves. We needed a Savior.

And so God came in the person of Jesus to die in our place. Christmas was always about the cross. For *this* reason Jesus was born – to bear the burden of our sin, because we could not bear it ourselves.

God, in Jesus, was willing to die to show us His love. My friends, you can trust God, because he is a covenant God. Our God is a till-death-do-us-part kind of God. He will not forget you. How could he? Your name is engraved on the palms of his hands.

Our God is forever and always faithful. Amen? Amen!

Prayer: “Heavenly Father, thank you for your faithful love. Thank you for sending Jesus so that we can have a relationship with you. We rejoice in your mercy and celebrate your grace. We praise you for your faithful love. Amen.

This sermon borrows heavily from the book *Under Wraps: The Gift We Never Expected*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014. Chapter 4, “God is Faithful,” by Ed Robb; pp. 65-77,