

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT - B

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You guys have to help me jump start my homily today by helping me to complete this old phrase that we're all very familiar with: "Don't make promises you can't keep." And we all know what happens when some kids don't get what they want on Christmas morning – the first thing out of their mouths is "but you promised!"

Booker T. Washington tells the story that he met an ex-slave from Virginia. Two or three years before the Emancipation Proclamation, he made a contract with his master that he would be permitted to buy himself by paying so much per year for his body. While he was paying for himself, he was to be allowed to work wherever and for whomever he pleased. He decided to work in Ohio since the pay was better. Soon though, Lincoln's Emancipation granted freedom to him from any obligation to his master; yet he still owed his master three hundred dollars. A year or so later, the man walked back to his old master's house in Virginia and placed the last dollars that he owed him with interest in his hands. Though he didn't have to pay his debt, he had given his word. He had made a promise, and he knew that he couldn't enjoy freedom until he had fulfilled his part of the bargain.

Now let's go back to our theme throughout this Advent. In our first week, we were called to "take the time to make the time" to prepare for God's coming in our life because we never really know when it's going to happen. During the second week, we were reminded that repentance is a good way to prepare for the Lord's coming. Last weekend, the Scriptures reminded us to take the time to embrace change and transformation especially in our attitudes. As we move ever closer to Christmas, might the Scriptures be challenging us to once again take the time in our lives to believe and trust that God's promises that we've been preparing for will be fulfilled?

Promises are declarations that something will or will not happen. Promises demand trust. In the first reading from the Second Book of Samuel, God promises David that his house will endure forever. We see in the first reading that David has won many victories and defeated his enemies, both internally and externally. He has conquered Jerusalem and established it as the capital. David realizes how much he owes to Yahweh, and he builds a house of God there. But we hear the prophet Nathan speak against the grandiose building project. David thinks that when God proclaims that his house will endure forever, he's speaking of a physical structure. He was probably thinking, "but you promised!" Yet in the end, God shows he's faithful by making his house – his lineage – last forever.

For many people in Israel, after David's death, they began to forget about God's promises. Yet, others remained faithful. They thought God was going to raise up a new king like David, one who would be a great military leader, a man concerned with justice and with reverence for God. Many of them probably prayed every night, "Lord, but you promised!"

In the Gospel today, we see that God is indeed faithful to his promises, though it doesn't come at the time or in the way we always expect. At the heart of the announcement to Mary is the reminder of God's original promise: "God will give him the throne of his father David." Most people didn't expect that God's promises would be fulfilled through Mary, a young Jewish woman without a

husband. Mary's even confused by the event. She asks, "How can this be? Remember what you promised!" Yet Mary accepts her mission with trust, "Be it done unto me according to your word."

I don't know about you, but when things aren't happening quite the way I wanted them to or when exactly I want them to happen, I sometimes cry out to God, "But you promised!" Today's Gospel for this fourth Sunday of Advent reminds us that God's promises are best fulfilled not in buildings or great kings like David, but in faith and trust like we find in Mary, who in the midst of confusion remains faithful to God's promise.

We've taken the time to wait and to prepare for God's coming this Advent. We've repented of our sinfulness with the hope to change our life and transform our attitudes. We're reminded today that God's promises will soon be fulfilled. There's just one little thing left for us to do this Advent – to trust that God is faithful to his end of the bargain. Will you uphold your Advent promises?