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Speak...Covenant

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When I was a kid, my dad would take one or more of us kids on errands with him. He was a pastor, so we were used to tagging along for all kinds of visits. It wasn't unusual for us to stop at other churches for my dad to chat with another pastor for a bit. One evening we stopped at the Methodist church, and we walked into a room that was dark. I seem to remember my dad looking for the light switch when someone took my hand and then the lights came on there were a bunch of parents and kids standing in a circle. And then someone said – "Welcome to Cub Scouts" and my awesome meter redlined with excitement.

I had been begging my folks to let me join the cub scouts and just when all hope seemed to be lost – I was in! The whole world seemed to open up. The clouds parted. In that moment what the prophet Isaiah said – the wolf shall lay down with the lamb... the calf and the lion hanging out... the snakes no longer bite...everything—all of it was true!

And then I learned the cub scout motto... "Do your best..." Yes, I will! I will do my best. I remember going to cub scout camp that summer and in all the activities, trying to do my best. There were competitions and, in those days, not everyone got a ribbon. Oh no... top three and we all learned that sometimes our best wasn't good enough. I found that out as my best wasn't good enough in the archery competition. The bow and arrow just weren't accessible to me. I found that my life trajectory was more in line with Friar Tuck than Robin Hood.

But that motto – "Do your best..." has stuck with me over the years and has certainly influence my relationship with our Creator God. It's almost as if in the story of God and us, God continues to encourage us to do our best. Do our best in relationship with creation. Do our best in relationship with one another. Do our best in relationship with God. And in that story of God and us we see examples of humanity doing their best.

Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew puts it this way - 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the

kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Mat 25:34-40

But in the story of God and us we also see examples of humanity doing their best to not do their best. God calls this a "breaking covenant". And this breaking covenant is also described in Matthew's Gospel - *For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'* Mat 25:42-45

The closest thing we can point to is a marriage covenant. And we know how painful a broken marriage covenant can be. However, there is something amazing about all these covenants. There are five big covenants in the story of God and us and they all have something in common. This one may be the most central – It's the covenant between God and Abraham... *I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* Genesis 12:2-3

This covenant was made as God was giving Moses the Ten Commandments... *You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for*

me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.

Exodus 19:4-6

This covenant was made as a promise through the prophet Jeremiah... *But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.* Jeremiah 31:33

And this is the final covenant from Jesus that echoes the prophet Jeremiah... *Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.* Luke 22:19-20

Now there are some remarkable similarities between all these covenants. The first is that God is the one who makes the covenant. It's like God grabbing your hand as you enter a dark room and when the light comes on you know who you are. Filled with hope for a new beginning. God is highly interested in you. The creator of all things calls out to you for relationship.

The second is that all the covenants have a purpose beyond the covenant itself. These covenants are made to make the world a better place. You are blessed to be a blessing, a blessing to others. A blessing to your family, your friends, a blessing to strangers. The covenant that is the Ten Commandments – most of them are focused on treating ourselves and others better. God says, "Do your best", and the world will be a better place.

Here at Prince of Peace we are doing just that. Doing our best, taking a hold of the hands of those who at times are the overlooked and at times the forgotten. Being a blessing, Speaking Covenant.