

The Rev. Joel Petruschke
Our Saviour Lutheran Church
June 5, 2022
Pentecost

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, probably one of most familiar of all poems in all of poetry is that by Robert Frost entitled "The Road Not Taken."

And we all know that most famous of lines from the poem.

"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference."

Yes, that Frost poem "The Road Not Taken" is a poem with which most everyone is familiar.

PAUSE

But there is another Frost poem that I want to share with you this morning.

You may likely know this poem as well.

Personally, it is my wife's favorite poem, and one of mine, too.

It is entitled "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening."

It is a poem about an individual who takes a moment to pause in a wooded area while travelling by horse during a wintry night.

And I would beg your indulgence as I read the poem in its entirety.

It is not a terribly long poem by any means.

So, here it goes. Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening.

Whose woods are these I think I know.

His house is in the village though;

He will not see me stopping here

To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark, and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

I love that poem, especially the final stanza.

The woods are lovely, dark, and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

In other words, even though the scene is lovely, the traveler can't linger too long, as this traveler has some distance to journey yet before he or she can bed down for the night.

Indeed, it sounds as though, this traveler has promised someone, their spouse, their family, their business partner, whomever...

This traveler has promised to arrive at his or her destination to rendezvous with someone at some given time.

To be sure, the traveler says, "I have promises to keep and miles to go before I sleep."

PAUSE

But I want us to note especially, that the traveler repeats the last line.

And miles to go before I sleep.
And miles to go before I sleep.

Why repeat that last line?

Is it just to emphasize that the traveler has yet a long way to go in their journey by horseback?

Or is there something else going on?

PAUSE

In truth, Frost in this poem is no doubt defining sleep in two ways.

Sleep is that rest we take after a long day.

But sleep is also that rest we take at the end of life.

Sleep should also be defined then as death.

The woods are lovely, dark, and deep.

But I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep,

And miles to go before I die.

And so, not only does the traveler have promises to keep in this night of travel, so as to rendezvous with love ones or some business partner.

Not only does the traveler have promises to keep in his physical journey on horseback...

But Frost is saying that the traveler, and each one of us who travels the path of life...

Frost is saying as well the traveler also has promises to keep throughout the earthly journey.

You and I, and all people, have promises to keep today, tomorrow, and the next day...all the way through life until we arrive at that great sleep we call death.

So, as lovely as this poem is, in its description of an idyllic scene of woods in winter...

As lovely as this poem is, it is also deeply philosophical.

It is also deeply theological.

Because the truth that Frost wants to emphasize is that life consists of promises. That is why he repeats the line at the end.

That is what life is all about—it is about promises.

PAUSE

For instance, as children we make promises to our parents such that we promise to obey our parents, and to do what is asked of us by our parents.

As children we make promises to our teachers, such that we promise to attend our classes, behave in school, and do our homework.

As children we make promises to our coaches, such that we promise to attend practice, show up for games, and do our best.

Furthermore, as adults we make promises to our employers, such that we will show up at work and will faithfully perform our duties as asked.

As adults we also make promises to pay our taxes and to be good citizens.

As adults we also make promises to our spouse, such that we will be faithful and loving.

Yes, we make all sorts of promises throughout life.

Indeed, life is comprised of promises.

And there is much truth to the saying that we are only as good as our word.

We are only as good as the promises we keep.

PAUSE

And, today in the church year, today on this Sunday of Pentecost, it is all about promises.

As much as our secular lives are about promises, so are our faith lives also.

Today, on this Sunday of Pentecost, we acknowledge and celebrate that God keeps God's promises.

Today, we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And, Jesus told us that after he (Jesus) had ascended to God the Father, God would send the gift of the Holy Spirit to be with God's people forever.

And today, we have heard about how on the day of Pentecost long ago, the disciples were all gathered in one place.

And then the rush of a violent wind filled the entire house where the disciples were gathered.

And then divided tongues of fire appeared and rested on each of the disciples.

And then the disciples began to speak in other languages.

All of these things—wind, fire, speaking in other languages—all these things are signs of the Holy Spirit.

Yes, God keeps God's promises, such that God has sent the Holy Spirit to God's people.

And God blessed God's people such that the Holy Spirit formed God's people into the Church.

Yes, why we are here today, gathered together to hear God's Word...

Why we are gathered here today is because of the power of the Holy Spirit.

This thing here called the Church, this community doesn't happen unless the Spirit calls and gathers us.

People don't wake up on a Sunday morning, get out of bed, eat breakfast, get showered, and get in their cars and come to this building, just to listen to God's Word...

This doesn't happen unless the Holy Spirit is alive and well in the world and is active in our lives.

It is only by the work of the Spirit that this happens.

Yes, this is what God promised to God's people long ago, the gift of the Spirit.

And God continues to keep God's promise such that the Church continues to be called and gathered even today.

The Church, what we see right here, is God keeping God's promise.

Pentecost is about promises.

And so there is a reason, why the Church tends to celebrate Confirmation on Pentecost.

Not always, but most churches celebrate their young people's confirmation on Pentecost, because Pentecost is about promises.

For we will see in the rite of Affirmation of Baptism, which is the ceremony we use for confirmation...

We will see in the rite of Affirmation of Baptism that our young persons, Evan and Tyler, will also make promises this day before God and in the presence of the congregation...

When Evan and Tyler were baptized, their families made promises on their behalf...to bring them to church, to hear God's Word and to share in the Lord's Supper, and to see to their instruction in the teachings of the church, which is what takes places in Sunday School and Confirmation...

Yes, where before Evan's and Tyler's families had once made promises on their behalf at the time of baptism, and kept those promises as they matured, now today Evan and Tyler affirm their baptismal promises for themselves.

They affirm that they are now ready to keep their baptismal promises for themselves.

Yes, Confirmation is a rite of passage, Confirmation is a coming of age, whereby young people assume a greater responsibility for their faith development.

That is what the Affirmation of Baptism is all about.

And so, Evan and Tyler will be asked, "Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism..."

In other words, they will be asked, "Do you PROMISE to continue in the relationship God made with you in holy baptism..."

Evan and Tyler will make promises this day, even as God continues to promise to be in relationship with them, and with all of us.

And then, and then, as members with Evan and Tyler in the body of Christ, we will make promises as well.

We will be asked, "People of God, do you promise to support Evan and Tyler and pray for them in their life in Christ?"

So all of us also make promises as well this day, to continue to care and to nurture Evan and Tyler in their faith lives.

PAUSE

Yes, Confirmation is about promises. Pentecost is about promises.

Yes, all of life is about promises. We can't escape it.

If we are people who exist in any kind of relationship with other people and with God, then promises are part and parcel to daily living.

So, Robert Frost was spot on. The woods may be lovely, dark, and deep. But we can linger too long.

Because we have promises to keep.

We all have promises to keep.

And miles to go before we sleep.

And miles to go before we sleep.

Thanks be to God. Amen.