

## Lent 2024

### ***Promises at the Crossroads of History and Hope***

**A worship series centered in the characters of the Abrahamic family**

**by Rev. Dr. Charlene Rachuy Cox**

### **Overview**

*At the crossroads of history and hope we live our lives.* There, our stories are lived and breathed and written into our flesh and our bones, our hearts and our spirits, to be remembered in the spoken and unspoken patterns and narratives, disappointments and dreams of our lives. No moment is removed from what has gone before. Every moment is linked with what is yet to be. History and hope dwell together within us, upon us, among us, and around us – companions that accompany us as we make our way in this world.

Each of us can probably name countless experiences – personal, local, and global – through which *the crossroads of history and hope* have profoundly shaped us. They are experiences of that which we can control and things we cannot, things done by us and things done to us, joy and sorrow, fulfillment and disappointment, trauma and triumph, the expected and unexpected, the planned and the never-imagined – for good and for ill. Through them all, the past and the future come together to create and fashion the present – and us in it – each and every day.

We begin and end jobs, commit to and dissolve relationships, name and nurture our children and send them out into the world. We imagine and reimagine our lives, settle down and relocate, invest in a passion and discover new ones. We lean into our callings and are called in new and surprising ways, to new and surprising things. And, local, national, and international phenomena alter the course of our lives in both known and unknown ways. We are simultaneously from what has been and being formed by and for what will be. History and hope, side-by-side intermingling in our daily lives.

The Church, by its very nature, stands *at the crossroads of history and hope*. We are a people and a story with a past and future. We bear responsibility for who and what we have been, and we profess a God who promises to make all things new. We come from innumerable experiences – both life-giving and life-denying – and we trust and believe in, proclaim and embody – a sure and certain hope. History and hope inseparable.

The season of Lent affords a unique opportunity to prayerfully consider this *crossroads of history and hope*. It invites us to reflect upon who and what we have been – *and* point to Christ – promise fulfilled, love incarnate, and hope embodied for the sake of the whole world. This Lent we will be immersed in the history and hope the Abrahamic family – Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, and Isaac – faith ancestors of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. We will look at, hear from, and be both assured and challenged by these five characters who lived a common history, were sustained by holy promises, were nourished by divine hope, and were shaped by it all in different ways.

As we do so, we will pray for peace in the Holy Land. We will hold space for one another as we consider how we experience our own common history in different ways, and we will hear anew God's life-giving and transformative *Promises at the Crossroads of History and Hope* for each of us and for the entire world.

## Resources available in early January will include

- Midrash-type monologue for each Abrahamic character (essentially, each character telling their story in the first person)
- “Near and Now” intergenerational study resource for each week
- “Engaging the Living Word” text study for teaching and preaching
- Liturgy for each service (framework for the liturgy is the *VOCARE* spiritual practice)
- Original Hymn – “The God of Promise Praise” (tune: ELW 831, 6 6 8 4 D)

## Ash Wednesday – February 14

- **Theme: Promises at the Crossroads of History and Hope**
- Readings: [Genesis 12:1-4](#); [Psalm 25:1-7](#); [Galatians 3:15-18](#); [Luke 22:14-23](#)
- Summary
  - God’s call and promise come to Abraham at the crossroads of history and hope. The flood has come and gone. People sought to “build a name for themselves” with a tower that reached to the heavens, and God confused their language and scattered them across the earth. History. Now, with Abraham, God does a new thing: God calls one person, and with that call comes the promise of blessing for the whole world. Hope. And through it all, God remembers. God remembers Abraham. God remembers God’s promises. God does the same for us. God calls. God promises. God remembers. Amid the everyday living of our lives, it can be easy to lose sight of this. During this Lent we will be drawn again and anew into God’s promises – for us and for the whole world. We will reflect upon what it means that God remembers God’s promises. And, we will proclaim that in mercy and steadfast love, God remembers each of us – and all of us – at our own crossroads of history and hope.
- Prayer: Remember me, O God, according to your steadfast love. In the name of +Jesus, Amen.

## First Week of Lent – February 21 – Abraham

- **Theme: God Calls and Covenants**
- Character Texts: [Genesis 12:4-9](#); [Genesis 15](#); [Genesis 17:1-14](#)
- Other readings: [Psalm 105:1-11](#); [Hebrews 11:8-12](#); [Matthew 1:1-17](#)
- Summary
  - The call of God comes unexpectedly to Abraham, and with that unexpected call come promises even more surprising. As Abraham’s story unfolds, we see that even when it appears to Abraham that God’s promises must not be trustworthy, God is faithful. Always. Even when Abraham doubts and maneuvers and manipulates, God does not go back on God’s word. The same is true for us – and for our world. The God who calls us, often in surprising ways and to surprising things, is faithful, trustworthy, and true to the promises God has made. In this we can trust. This is our hope.
- Prayer: Help me, O God, to hear you call upon my life and trust in your promises for me and for your whole creation. In the name of +Jesus, Amen.

## Second Week of Lent – February 28 – Hagar

- **Theme: God Sees and Sets Free**
- Character Text: [Genesis 16](#); [Genesis 21:8-21](#)
- Other readings: [Psalm 121](#); [II Corinthians 4:16-5:7](#); [Luke 13:10-17](#)
- Summary

- To be seen by God amid all of the pain, hurt, and suffering of life is a gift almost unimaginable. God, the Creator of the universe, sees you and cares about what happens to you. With that seeing and care, God is always moving toward justice, liberation, and blessing, even when we cannot comprehend it. This movement, however, is not always a straight line or a swift path. In Hagar's story, we see ourselves and our world in all of the interconnectedness and complexity that come with the challenges of being different together. We are bidden to ask, "how do we treat those who come from different places, live different lives, have different stories?" We are compelled to see and name injustice and our complicity and place in it, and we hear a voice of all who suffer at the hands of others. Through all of this, we discover the God who both sees and sets free at the crossroads of history and hope.
- Prayer: Look kindly upon me, O God, and set me free from all that oppresses me. In the name of +Jesus, Amen.

### Third Week of Lent – March 6 – Sarah

- **Theme: God Declares and Delivers**
- Character Texts: [Genesis 17:15-22](#); [Genesis 18:1-15](#); [21:1-7](#)
- Other readings: [Psalm 100](#); [Hebrews 11:1-3](#); [Luke 8:40-56](#)
- Summary
  - It is one thing to speak a promise; it is another thing to deliver upon that promise. It is one thing to hear a promise; it is another thing to experience the fulfillment of that promise in our lives. In Sarah's story, we encounter every person who has ever had unfulfilled hopes and unaccomplished dreams. And we encounter everyone who has been surprised by joy. Tears and laughter, intermingling in the history and hope of our personal lives and the life of the world. Through it all, there is God who declares a promise and then delivers upon it, both of which are born within Sarah's own body. She is an old woman, unable to bear children: the declaration that she will, seems like a joke. She is an old woman, carrying a child: in her deliverance, how could laughter not spill forth from her? Her inability to bear children is her history; the word of God – declared and delivered – is her hope. All that is empty and unfulfilled in our lives and the life of world becomes threaded through our history; the Word of God – declared and delivered – is our hope. At this crossroads we dwell.
- Prayer: Speak your Word of promise to me, O God, and bring it to fulfillment in my life. In the name of +Jesus, Amen.

### Fourth Week of Lent – March 13 – Ishmael

- **Theme: God Hears and Helps**
- Character Texts: [Genesis 21:8-21](#); [Genesis 25:7-18](#)
- Other readings: [Psalm 13](#); [Romans 8:31-38](#); [Luke 7:11-17](#)
- Summary
  - To cry out to God amid distress and trust that God hears – this is the comfort of all in need. How often have we cried out to God? How often have we wondered if God hears us in our misery? How often have we raised our voices saying, "how long, O Lord? How long?" The story of Ishmael reminds us that our cries do not go out into an empty, meaningless void; rather, our cries go to the ears, and therefore the very heart, of God. And God hears. That is God's promise both for us and to us. God hears when we cry. And in hearing, God helps. This story also reminds us that God's help extends beyond

any barriers we might erect or any limitations we might impose: Ishmael is cast out, and yet God hears and helps him. Hence, we see that God's promises at the crossroads of history and hope are God's to give, transgressing human exclusion and transcending human boundaries.

- Prayer: Hear my voice when I cry to you, O God. Come to me and help me in my time of need. In the name of +Jesus, Amen.

### **Fifth Week of Lent – March 20 – Isaac**

- **Theme: God Protects and Provides**
- Character Texts: [Genesis 21:1-7](#); [Genesis 22:1-19](#); [Genesis 25:7-11](#)
- Other readings: [Psalm 91](#); [Hebrews 11:17-20](#); [Luke 12:22-32](#)
- Summary
  - The story of Isaac is a complicated one. This child of the promise becomes a demonstration of his father's commitment to God by his father's willingness to cause him harm at God's direction, harm that is ultimately not perpetrated only because God intervenes. Whew! But God does not always intervene in this way in our lives or the life of the world. Our personal crossroads of history and hope are often crossroads that we come to because of real and lasting harm perpetrated by others and by us. Likewise, the crossroads of history and hope within the global story are often the same: it is often harm that brings the world to the brink and in need of hope. To wrestle with the promises of protection and providence that the Isaac story uplifts, then, is to name the promises, name the paradoxes, and to seek God in the midst of it all, trusting that God is who God claims to be, and the God who makes promises will indeed keep them.
- Prayer: Protect me, O God, from all that would bring me harm, and provide for me according to your will. In the name of +Jesus, Amen.

### **Revised Common Lectionary**

A "Near and Now" intergenerational study resource will be provided for each RCL Sunday Gospel reading. The theme *Promises at the Crossroads of History and Hope* will inform these study resources.

VOCARE liturgies for Holy Communion and Service of the Word, particular to Lent, will also be provided.