



Living Lent | March 30

## Covenant

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*When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God."*

**Genesis 17: 1-8 (NRSV)**

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### Encouragement for the Lenten Journey:

The covenant (promise) which God makes to Abraham is not the first promise that God makes nor will it be the last. A few chapters before (Genesis 9:8-17) God makes a promise to Noah and by extension to all "flesh upon the earth" that God will never again destroy the earth with a flood. Now God is promising to Abram (soon to be Abraham) that Abram will be the father of a multitude of nations. This is a rephrasing of the promise that God makes to Abram in chapter 12 when God tells Abram to leave his father's house and that when he does, God will bless him and make of him a great nation. Later, in Exodus, God makes a covenant with Moses on behalf of the Hebrew people that with the giving of the Law, God will be their God and they will be God's people.

What lies behind each of these promises is that it is always God who makes the first move; it is God who establishes the covenants; it is God who reaches out, and it is our place to respond.

We can certainly see that although God is perfect in upholding God's part of the promise, it is not the case for us. We fail repeatedly to keep our side of the promise, to live as God has shown us. Certainly, this cannot be a surprise to God. And yet God does not desert us. Over and over God reaches out in love: to Noah, to Abraham, to Moses. And when in our brokenness, over and over, we fall short, God gives Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves: to overcome sin and death and give us the hope of a resurrected life in the presence of God. That is the promise of Easter, the great and final promise.

Here, now in Lent, we have the time to reflect on the ways in which we fall short of the dream that God has for us, the ways in which God reaches out to us, and by that reflection prepare ourselves to be the people of God. Yes, we fall short, but God is a God of love, acting in the history of the world, saving, redeeming, and giving us hope that while we may fail, God never does.

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### ***Contributor and Contributing Body of Christ***

The Reverend William (Bill) H. Barton is the Priest at St Andrews & St. Cyprian's Episcopal Churches located in Darien, Georgia. St. Andrew's is a historic church originally built in 1844 and burned during the Civil War. The present building was completed in 1879. Rich in history and an exceptionally beautiful church, completed in 1879 of classic 14th century English architect, the Church and its congregation serves the McIntosh County and Georgia low country in an exceptional manner. Likewise, St. Cyprian's is a historical tabby church built by the formerly enslaved people from Butler's Island after the Civil war. The church was consecrated in 1876 and is believed to be one of the largest tabby structures still in use in Georgia. It is part of the Episcopal Community of McIntosh County, and serves as inspiration for the steady presence of Service above Self in the County of McIntosh and beyond.

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