

Sermon God's Promises and the Call to Participate

Hebrews 6:13-20, 8:1-6; John 9:1-41

Introduction: The Tension Between Promise and Reality

We have heard three rich and challenging passages—Hebrews 6:13-20, 8:1-6, and John 9:1-41. Together they invite us to reflect on the nature of God's promises and the way those promises take shape in the real world. They ask us to hold together two truths: that God's promises are trustworthy, and that their fulfilment often unfolds through human participation. Hebrews 6:13-20 reminds us that God's promise to Abraham is grounded in God's own being: "Since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself." This is not a casual reassurance; it is a declaration that God's faithfulness is woven into the very fabric of creation.

And yet, when we look at the world—its injustices, its exclusions, its wounds—we may wonder how these promises are being realised. The story of the man born blind in John 9 meets us precisely in that tension. It challenges us to see God's work in unexpected places and to ask what it means to live as people who trust God's promises while actively participating in their unfolding.

These texts open up a vision of God's covenant as dynamic, inclusive, and always expanding—and a vision of faith as courageous participation in God's work of justice and healing.

1. Hebrews 6:13-20 and 8:1-6 A Promise That Expands, a Covenant That Grows

Traditionally, Hebrews 6:13-20 is read as a reassurance of God's unchanging nature, while Hebrews 8:1-6 is sometimes interpreted as a replacement of the old covenant with the new. This can lead to a sense of exclusivity—as though God's promises are limited to a particular group or a particular way of believing.

But I think we can see something different here. The promise to Abraham is not replaced; it is expanded. The new covenant is not a rejection of the old but a deepening of it. God's faithfulness is not confined to one people, one tradition, or one moment in history—it is ever-widening, ever-unfolding.

Hebrews 8:1-6 speaks of a covenant written on hearts, not tablets. This is not a legal contract but a living relationship. It grows as we grow. It expands as our understanding of justice, compassion, and human dignity expands.

This perspective invites us to ask:

How do we honour our tradition while remaining open to the new things God is doing?

How do we ensure that our understanding of God's promises reflects the radical inclusivity of Christ?

How do we participate in the ongoing work of this covenant—this work of justice, mercy, and love?

The covenant is not something done to us; it is something God invites us to join.

2. John 9: Seeing Differently, Living Differently

John 9 is not simply a miracle story. It is a story about perception, power, and participation.

The disciples ask, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus refuses the premise. He rejects the theology of blame. He refuses to see suffering as punishment. Instead, he reframes the man's life as a place where God's work can be revealed.

The man is not a passive recipient. Jesus sends him to wash in the pool of Siloam. He must act. He must trust. He must participate. Faith here is not assent to doctrine; it is courageous action.

After his healing, the man is cast out by the religious authorities. His experience of grace disrupts the status quo. His new sight exposes the spiritual blindness of those who cling to certainty, purity, and institutional control. It challenges their propensity to exclude. This is where this reading becomes especially powerful:

The story critiques systems that exclude. It challenges religious gatekeeping. It reveals how institutions can resist the very work of God they claim to defend. It shows that God's work often appears outside the boundaries we draw.

By the end of the story, the man born blind becomes the clearest voice in the room. He speaks from lived experience: "I was blind, but now I see." He refuses to deny the truth of grace at work in him.

He becomes, in a sense, the first theologian in John's Gospel—not because he has the right answers, but because he tells the truth of what God has done in his life.

But there is something heartbreaking about John 9 that we must not miss. In the whole story, the only person who smiles is the man who has just been healed. Everyone else is grim, anxious, defensive, or furious. A man who has never seen light, colour, faces, or sky suddenly sees everything — a miracle that should have sparked laughter, celebration, and tears of joy. Instead, the atmosphere feels more like a courtroom than a festival.

And the miracle itself is even more astonishing than we often realise. As neurologist Oliver Sacks observed, restoring sight is not simply repairing the eyes; it requires the brain to learn an entirely new way of interpreting the world. People who gain sight after lifelong blindness often struggle to walk, to judge distance, to recognise objects. They must learn to see. Yet this man walks, speaks, recognises, and navigates with ease. Jesus has not only healed his eyes — he has given him the inner capacity to see.

It is a miracle of unimaginable depth — and yet only one person rejoices.

Why? Because as the story unfolds, we discover that some people do not want God to show up unless God arrives on their terms. The Pharisees cannot accept a miracle that breaks their categories. They cannot accept a healer who does not follow their rules. They cannot accept a God who acts outside their systems. And so they twist themselves into knots to deny what is right in front of them. They interrogate the man, his parents, each other — anyone but themselves.

Meanwhile, the healed man stands there with a goofy grin, repeating the only truth he knows: "I once was blind, but now I see." But his joy is too much for them. His freedom is too much. His testimony is too much. So they throw him out.

It is a sobering moment. Because it reveals how easy it is — especially for religious people — to miss the work of God when it does not conform to our expectations. We can become so attached to our rules, our traditions, our categories, our sense of how God ought to behave, that we fail to celebrate the grace unfolding right in front of us.

Sometimes our scruples, our boundaries, our certainty about what is “proper,” can blind us to the presence of God in another person. The Pharisees in John 9 cannot see the miracle because they cannot imagine God acting outside their rules. And so, ironically, the ones who claim to see are the ones who remain in the dark.

And notice something else: from the moment the arguments begin, Jesus disappears from the story. From verse 7 to verse 35, he is nowhere to be seen. It is as though the more people argue about what God can or cannot do, the harder it becomes to see Jesus at all. But the moment the healed man is thrown out — the moment he is alone again, still smiling, still open, still grateful — Jesus returns. And the man, without hesitation, without consulting a catechism or rulebook, worships him.

This is the heart of the story:

Wherever the real Jesus is at work, joy breaks out. Wherever rigid certainty takes over, joy disappears.

And that brings us back to the covenant written on the heart. A heart open to God’s surprising grace will always recognise the presence of Christ — even when Christ comes in unexpected way

3. Bridging the Texts: Promise and Participation

Hebrews and John 9 belong together. Hebrews tells us that God’s promise is trustworthy. John shows us that God’s work often unfolds through human courage. Hebrews speaks of a covenant written on hearts.

John shows a heart awakened to truth and justice. Hebrews invites us to trust God’s faithfulness. John invites us to participate in God’s healing.

Together they reveal a God who is faithful and a people who are called to act.

God’s promises are for all people. God’s covenant is inclusive and expanding. God’s work is revealed when we participate in justice, compassion, and liberation. God’s light opens our eyes not only to personal transformation but to social transformation. The man born blind becomes a model for us: he receives sight, but he also uses it. He challenges injustice. He speaks truth. He refuses to be silenced. This is what covenantal faithfulness looks like in practice.

Conclusion: Living as People of the Promise

As we leave today, may we carry with us the courage of the man born blind—the courage to see differently, to speak truthfully, and to act faithfully.

Let us ask ourselves:

Where is God inviting me to participate in healing and justice?

Where might I need to wash in the pool of Siloam—to take a step of faith that opens my eyes?

Where am I being called to challenge exclusion, to widen the circle, to embody the covenant written on the heart?

The God who swore by God’s own self as referenced in Hebrews is the same God who kneels in the dust with a man born blind. The promise and the healing belong together. One anchors us; the other awakens us. One assures us of God’s faithfulness; the other calls us to participate in God’s work.

May we trust the promise.

May we join the work.

And may we see the world as God sees it and live as People of the Promise-seeing the world full of love, full of possibility, full of people waiting for justice, dignity, and compassion.

Amen