

**Anglican Church Noosa**  
**HOPE through Lent - Wk 1**  
**Hope from God's Promises**  
**Genesis 12:1-9 & Genesis 15:1-6**  
**Rev'd Brad Henley**

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What a week! Cyclone Alfred kept the meteorologists, and all of us guessing. It was coming at category 2, 3, or possibly 1. It was moving quickly, then slowly, then going in circles around itself. It was going to cross over onto land on Thursday, then Friday, then Saturday or Sunday. The major impact was going to be along about 600km of coastline or perhaps just 100km.

Now, as much as the predicted damage from the storm itself was intimidating. The continually changing cyclone predictions brought anxiety, tension, and fear.

When storms come into our lives, where can we go for hope? Where can we look for hope in literal storms, and in the tough, stormy times of life?

This week our community has found some hope and benefit from the Bureau of Meteorology, other meteorologists, Council workers, SES, Ambos, Paramedics, Police, Firefighters, friends, family, neighbours, loads of people who have been prepared to help one another find some hope in the cyclonic and tropical stormy conditions.

This week as we've faced the anxiety, tension and stress of the storm we've been able to press in to God in prayer, to lean on one another, to find comfort, support, and hope in our community and other believers.

For our Hope 25 Lent series we're looking at Eternal, Solid, Real hope. Hope that goes beyond the temporary challenges, storms and tensions of this life. Hope that can ground us. Giving us a solid foundation for this life and eternity.

There is nothing wrong with finding hope in the people and things around us. In fact, the Bible calls us to be inter-dependent – not independent – to rely on each other when times are tough. That's why the Bible says it was not good for Adam to be alone. We're made for God and for each other. But the all-encompassing hope of Jesus lifts the horizontal person-to-person hope to a deeper, higher, infinitely more comprehensive level. The Hope of Jesus helps us recognise that every good gift comes from God and brings us back to God.

If you've been working through the Hope 25 Lenten Studies you will have encountered our two Genesis passages and more this week. Genesis 12 & 15 are like the hinge that the rest of the Bible turns on. The covenant God makes here can be traced throughout the whole Bible showing God's faithfulness from the beginning to end.

Back in Genesis 1 to 11 there are hints and promises for us. Things like God is a God who brings light that casts out darkness. He blesses, He gives generously to us, He clothes

naked and ashamed people with righteousness through sacrifice. He limits the effects of sin and promises to one day crush the head of the evil one. In Genesis 9 God established a Covenant, a solemn relationship of promise and hope with Noah.

Then in Chapter 12 God calls Abram and makes him three promises.

Through the gracious work of God:

1. Abram will become a great nation,
2. He will have a great name, and
3. The whole world will be blessed through him.

Then, surprisingly, we find out that Abram was 75 years old. And Abram and Sarai were childless. We're meant to ask the question ... "How could God keep his hope-filled promises to Abram when Abram and Sarai were ... let's just say, well beyond the years of child-bearing?"

In Chapter 15 God reiterates his promises to Abram. And He expands on the promises saying, "Look up at the sky, Abram, and count the stars – if you can ... So shall your offspring be!"

Away from city lights, Abram saw an uncountable sea of stars. A staggering promise from God.

In this covenant God binds himself to the human race. Abram's millions of descendants would be blessed to be a blessing and one of those descendants would be Jesus, the one through whom the whole world would be blessed.

God was always committed to His creatures - he even made us in His image. He wanted none of the creatures made in His image to be defaced/ killed. In Chapter 15 He commits to us even more than he is already. God commits to keeping the promises that he made to Abram in chapter 12. And he does so in a way that may seem very strange to us.

But first we need to understand: what is a covenant? Let me tell you a story.

In 2006 Becky Zerbe wrote an article for *Marriage Partnership* magazine. Her husband, Roger, suffered from early onset Alzheimer's disease, and journaled this to his wife after a particularly troubling bout of forgetfulness. It's a beautiful illustration of Covenant Marriage:

*Honey, today fear is taking over. The day is coming when all my memories of this life we share will be gone. You and the boys will be gone from me. I will lose you even as I am surrounded by you and your love. I don't want to leave you. I want to grow old in the warmth of memories. Forgive me for leaving so slowly and painfully.*

Blinking back tears, Becky wrote:

*My sweet husband, I will continue to go on loving you and caring for you—not because you know me or remember our life, but because I remember you. I will remember the man who*

*proposed to me and told me he loved me, the look on his face when his children were born, the father he was, the way he loved our extended family. I'll recall his love for riding, hiking, and reading; his tears at sentimental movies; the unexpected witty remarks; and how he held my hand while he prayed. I cherish the pleasure, obligation, commitment, and opportunity to care for you because - I remember you!*

It's a beautiful, heartbreaking and heartwarming story showing the depth and reality of a covenant relationship.

The covenant of marriage is a sacred relationship, so much more than a contract. A contract is an agreement kind of made in suspicion. The parties come together trying to trust each other, all the while including fine print to protect themselves and let themselves off the hook if they do wrong. They set limits on their own responsibility and suspect the other may not completely uphold their side of the bargain.

In contrast, in a covenant the parties come together in trust. The parties love each other and don't put limits on their own responsibility. The most common covenantal relationship we think of today is that of marriage. And although it seems to have lost some of its value due to easy to file divorces, marriage is meant to be a representation of the relationship between Christ and the Church. It's like Becky and Roger's marriage, but so much more. God's covenant with us is loving, faithful and eternal.

Well, the way that a contract was made in Abram's time was peculiar. The two parties would talk over the terms, and then they would find some animals, chop them in half and lie the halves down with space to walk in between. The covenant was made as the parties walked between the halves of the animals saying, "If I break my part of the agreement then may I become like these animals." That's serious stuff!

So let's look at the covenant between Abram and God.

In Gen 12 they talked about the details - God would make Abram a great nation - lots of descendants, he would make Abram's name great, and the whole world would be blessed through him.

In Gen 15 God restates some of the agreement. Abram has his doubts because he is so old but once God tells him in no uncertain terms that that is how it will be it says in verse 6, "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness". Just like today, even back then at the beginning, the way to be right with God was through faith, through trusting God's word.

What is even more peculiar about God's covenant with Abram is that Abram fell asleep before he could walk between the animals. The two parties that walked between the half animals were God and God. It says a smoking firepot and a blazing torch passed between the pieces.

In effect God was saying, should I break this covenant, may I become like one of these animals. And amazingly He was also saying, "Abram, should you break this covenant, may I

become like one of these animals.” God was saying that he would pay the price even if Abram didn’t live up to his side of the relationship.

God is the covenanting God. He is the one that we have always been able to trust and He urges us to trust Him now. That is the only true, deep hope we have in life.

God called Abram’s descendants, the Israelites, to be an example, a light for all nations. They were to draw people to themselves because they were God’s chosen people through whom the whole world would be blessed. Many times they failed to live in good relationship with God and God bore that breaking of the covenant on himself. In the fulness of time Jesus came and paid the price for all of Abram’s children and the whole world.

Jesus made it possible for us all to be in right relationship with God and to be a part of God fulfilling his promise. Through us going out into all the corners of the earth God is blessing the whole world.

When we see God’s covenantal faithfulness throughout the Bible and throughout history we are drawn to trusting Him more and more. He is faithful. He is dependable. He is God.

So where do we find our hope today? Not in our own ability to hold onto God, but in God’s covenant faithfulness to hold onto us. The storms of life - both literal and figurative - will come, but we have an anchor that holds firm.

Jesus, the covenant-keeping God, has already borne the cost of our failures and secured our future. He is our unshakable, eternal hope. So, whether we face uncertainty, suffering, doubt, or storms, we can trust that His promises never fail.

Let’s rest in that hope today. Let’s trust in Him, not just in the calm, but in the storm. Amen.