People of Promise Gen 9:8-17, 1 Peter 3:18-22, Mark 1:9-15

Visiting our eldest son's family this week Julie & I heard of a recent baptism in their church. The young woman, as a youth in China had been taught, "Religion is a folly; there is no God." But as an adult working in the Middle East she found, to her surprise, everyone had a religion! Her resulting search led her to Jesus, her recent baptism and a wonderful new life!

Tens of thousands of new converts will be baptised this Easter, for many, the 40 days of Lent a serious preparation time. And for all, the 40 days of Lent can be a time to fast, pray and reflect on where we're at with God, recalling or anticipating our baptism.

Did anyone see Angelina Jolie's movie, "Unbroken", featured in the Dec. issue of "Insights"?[1]

Louis Zamperini, misbehaving son of a Catholic immigrant family, victim-of-racial-bullying, rose as he started running, to popularity, success, and then fame as youngest ever US qualifier for the Olympic 5000m. He got 8th place in Berlin in 1936!

Then, as a bombardier in WWII, he was one of three to survive a crash into the middle of the Pacific. With little food or water, sharks circling, an aircraft shooting at them, many times Louis pledged to seek and serve God the rest of his life, should he survive. He and one other did survive, but only to endure, initially, more
than two years of unspeakable torture, as a POW.

Some, reading the story of Noah, see principally a story of judgement, but Peter, rightly, interprets it also, as a story of salvation! - the rainbow, the sign of God's covenant promise, not to destroy, but to save! In OT and New, God's invitation is to life, not death, freedom not bondage. Reflecting on the flood story Peter says, "God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which … eight persons, were *saved* through water.

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[1] "Insights" UCA Synod of NSW & ACT Pp 28-31

Not that they were saved by the water, but by the appeal (or pledge[2]) to God from a good conscience. We are **a people of promise** – Yes! God makes a promise to us; we can pledge or promise to Him - He promises to be our God, we can promise to be His. He promises to save, we can trust, serve, and promise to proclaim the forgiveness and salvation we have received through the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Peter reminds us in his next letter – "The Lord is not slow about his promise, … but is patient with you,[a] not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.[3] Is he waiting for you - to believe, receive & accept Jesus, as Saviour & Lord? To be set free?

Wanting none to perish, but all to repent, God is waiting, seeking all, including you & me! (Cf. Ezek18:32)

Every book of the Bible in some way points to God's heart to save, to set people free and restore, through Jesus, who died in order to bring us to God.

In His baptism in the Jordan, Jesus, pledged to do His Father's will. God affirmed, "I am pleased with you." Straight away He was tested[4], 40 days of great physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual stress – a test effectively resisted by His sure knowledge of God's word and His commitment to the greatest task of all time. And so, following His baptism and temptation He began His task – proclaiming the Good News of God – "the time is right, the Kingdom of God is near, repent, and believe the Good News!" Still so!

In our 40 days leading to the cross, we may reflect on the pain and cost of God's love in Jesus and His faithfulness to His promise, despite our responses, often wanting; and if baptised or considering baptism, we may think this Lent on our promises to Him.

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[2] 1 Peter 3:21 *a pledge to God from*

[3] NRSV 2 Pet 3:9   [a] other ancient authorities read *on your account*

[4] Cf Temptation of Jesus in Mt 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13

In our Baptism and Confirmation (Reaffirmation of Baptism) services, candidates reply to a number of questions with the response, "With God's help I will."

One question is: Will you proclaim, by word and example, the good news of God in Christ? We reply - **With God's help, I will.** With God's help I will proclaim the love of Jesus, who gave his life for me, who was tortured for me, who forgave His enemies, even me. I will proclaim Jesus who has forgiven me, given me meaning and purpose, who can set every heart free, break every barrier down, restore every soul securely to God, for eternity. I promise! ….

But, promises can be forgotten, or derailed by worries, or other projects. Our project, is to proclaim Jesus Christ, who suffered for our sins once, and for all, the just for the unjust, in order to bring us to God. Cf 1 Pet 3:18

After the war, Louis Z. forgot his promise to God.

Six years of nightmares of revenge toward his captors and drowning in alcohol, his life was in a nosedive.

Then in 1949, reluctantly consenting to attend a Billy Graham Crusade, listening to Billy's preaching, he recalled his promises in the life raft and prison cell.

In heartfelt repentance, receiving the unconditional love and forgiveness of Jesus, now His Lord, his life was transformed. His captors he forgave, his nightmares ceased, his marriage was restored; a career as an inspirational speaker was launched. And on trips to Japan, he met, embraced and expressed forgiveness to many former captors - a number of whom, he reported, came to Christ[5].

Jesus, in His 40 days, recognised and rejected three things. Each would have prevented him from fulfilling his task. In our 40 days to Easter, would we seek to identify and reject those things that

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[5] "Unbroken Louis Zamperini: The Rest of the Story." *CBN*, Retrieved: December 28, 2014.

prevent us from fulfilling our task? As with his first disciples, Jesus invites today, "Come with me and I will teach you to catch people." Mk 1:17 GNB He's promised to teach us! Will we, go with, submit to, Jesus as our teacher?

This Lent, we can pledge ourselves again, (or perhaps for the very first time), to proclaim the love of God in Christ by word and example, and become *people catchers* for Jesus! It's a promise!