

I have always been a big fan of Donnie Osmond! As a teenager I would go weak at the knees at his puppy love and now as a grown woman my heart still misses a beat when I see or hear him sing. I just think he is gorgeous! When I was a teenager I longed to be able to go and see him and get his autograph but it was all just a dream. Then one day someone at school who knew that I really liked Donny said she had been to see him and that she had his autograph and she had now gone off him and so I could have it. I was so excited! I waited and waited for her to bring it in but she always had an excuse and after months of waiting I realised that I was never going to get my hands on his autograph. I was disappointed and sad because she had promised and then she had broken her promise.

Sadly, people break their promises to us all the time. Advertisers tell us all sorts of things that aren't strictly true. They promise us that our wrinkles will disappear if we use their face cream or that our whites will be dazzling if we use their washing powder or that our hair will turn heads if we use their hairspray. Politicians are experts at broken promises, their manifestos saying one thing and then sadly once they get into power they are unable to do everything they promised.

Promise-breaking is also part of everyday family life. Promises by children to do their chores or to be home by a certain time, or to try harder in school – and by adults to play that game with the children or to put up that shelf...are sometimes kept, but very often they're not. Usually because something else has come along that is far more exciting!

I bet some of us here are even guilty of breaking promises. How often have you said: I'll call you back. The cheque is in the post. We'll get together soon. I'll take care of it. We may have good intentions to keep those promises, but sometimes it's so much easier to say "yes" and get that person off the phone, even when we really want to say "no" or "I don't want to." What's more honest though? Telling someone "no," or telling someone "yes" but then not following through?

That's the dilemma Jesus creates in his parable this morning. The father asks his sons to go and work in the vineyard harvesting grapes. The first son says "no," which hurts his Father, even though he changes his mind later. The second son politely says, "yes," but then doesn't do what he says. Even though the Pharisees say the son who eventually goes to the vineyard is the better of the two, I don't think either of them deserves any awards. But doesn't it make you feel better knowing that 1st century parents had to put up with the same stuff you do?

Like most of Jesus' parables, this story has more levels to it and it isn't really about the two boys. It's about you and me. It's about two kinds of people in this world. The one kind professes faith in God, but doesn't live a faithful life. The other does the will of God while saying "no" to belief in God.

I don't know about you, but there have been times in my life when I've said all the right things about God and my faith but my actions have told a very different story as I have done whatever I wanted to do. But there was also a time in my life when I wanted nothing to do with God, but tried to live my life with as much integrity and goodness as possible.

Jesus is saying, "I know that some of you out there have said you believe in me, but have yet to live that way. And I know there are others out there who live a good life, but have yet to open their hearts to me. Maybe it hasn't been the right time yet. Maybe it's not the right time now. But I want you to know that I promise to be here waiting for you, when you do come to faith."

That's one promise that won't be broken. In a world where broken promises pile up and clutter our lives, there are some promises that we know we can stake our life on. Promises like, "I am the bread of life," and "This is my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." Promises like "I am with you, even unto the end of the age," and "Where two or three are gathered, I am with them." Through

Jesus Christ, God has promised to love us and be with us. God promises to weep with us, to mourn with us, to endure pain with us, to rejoice with us; to love each and every one of us as if there is only one person to love. Even when our faith is weak he keeps his promise. He also promises that if we allow him to work in our lives then he will help us to be stronger, more confident people who shine like a beacon in this world.

If you could look into the future and see the person God has promised you can become 12 months, 2 year or even ten years from now, you'd stand up and cheer, and you'd really want to become that person. You may already have seen changes in your life that you know were only possible because of God. Well don't ever think that he has finished his work in you because God never finishes with us. He has a plan for us and he works with us to complete it. God promises to love us as we are, and to love us into becoming more than we are. And that's a promise that is never broken.

The only proper response to this is to make our own promises in return. And I think the first promise we have to make is to be honest with God. It is better to be honest about where we are in our faith and tell him when we are struggling than to pretend everything is okay. God just wants us to be honest because then he can come and help us. God knows everything anyway and the only person we are kidding when we tell him everything is okay is us! It's OK to be honest and say, "God, I'm still struggling with this whole faith thing. I'm working on it, but I'm struggling" I think God would rather hear that than some empty promise of how we will do this or that in his name when what we really want to do is run away and hide. When we are down, when we are struggling, we shouldn't try to avoid God, we should search him out and be honest with him and ask him to help us. We should find friends who can pray with us and help us and we should just allow ourselves to belong to God and let him do the rest. His promise to be there with us is always true and never broken.

There's another promise we can make to God. It's the promise to let our faith dictate our actions. It's the promise to live like believers, to do those things that allow people to see Jesus in us. All sounds very pious but it isn't – all you have to do is help others and live your life the way Jesus showed us. If we make a promise to God to love Him and love our neighbours, and then act selfishly and ignore their needs, then we break God's heart. God knows what we can do and he gives us the resources to do it. If we need energy he will energise us, if we need words then he will speak them to our heart, if we need courage then he will hold us and fill us with the Holy Spirit so that we can be brave.

We need to proclaim the gospel and tell others about Jesus by our actions as well as our words because as Christians we have promised God that we will go and make disciples of all people.

In this parable, Jesus describes two kinds of people: those who say they'll go to the vineyard and do God's work and then don't, and those who say they won't, and then do. But there is a third type of person: the person who says they will do God's work, and then do it. Which one are you?

Oh and just one other thing – I had to wait 40 years but I did get to see Donny Osmond live in Liverpool and it was worth waiting for!