



### Lenten Reflection for Monday, March 21st

Maija VanRavenswaay

You can listen to the reading and reflection by clicking [here](#).

#### Romans 4:13 - 22

*For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations") —in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So numerous shall your descendants be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. Therefore his faith "was reckoned to him as righteousness."*

In reading this passage from Romans, I'm drawn to the idea of promises. Here it discusses the promises made to Abraham, but there is also the promise of salvation in Christianity more generally. In my own Buddhist practice, there is the promise that everyone is capable of spiritual enlightenment and escaping suffering. I also think of the promises we make to each other everyday like "Things will get better with time" or "You can get through this."

When people make these everyday promises to us, we might be feeling emotionally or spiritually a bit like Abraham and Sarah are described physically - like we've been alive so, so long already and it's hard to imagine joy and happiness blooming from our barren emotional landscape. In those moments, the promises made by friends, family, therapists, God (and our corresponding faith that they aren't just full of it) carry us through until the promise does come to fruition, seemingly against everything we felt to be true. These promises allow for hope - the ability to imagine a better future (or a future at all when times are really tough).

I was struck by the line about “God... call[ing] into existence the things that do not exist”. Whenever we have faith in another outcome, in the fulfillment of these spiritual promises, we join God into calling these better realities into existence.

A promise being fulfilled is not a passive endeavor; it’s an act of co-creation. The path to salvation for Christians is following Christ and living in a Christ-like way. Enlightenment only comes from a lifetime of dedicated cultivation. Overcoming grief, mental illness, pandemics, doesn’t just happen either. It’s through connecting with your community, mourning your losses, taking your medicine. We do these things even if it doesn’t seem like they will help, because we have faith that just maybe they will. When we look at this passage from Romans, consider the Buddha and others who attained Enlightenment, and continue to survive despite our own emotional and spiritual burdens, we see that our faith is well-founded.



*Maija VanRavenswaay has been part of Holy Apostles since October 2021 and lives nearby with her girlfriend, Emily, and their two cats. She works as a psychotherapist and in her free time likes to go rock climbing at the gym, play bass guitar, and cajole Emily into playing video games with her.*