

Second Sunday after Pentecost • June 23, 2019ⁱ

St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

Rev. Braun Campbell

Galatians 3:23-4:7

“Inheritor”

You're sitting there, waiting for the lawyer to speak. What's she going to say? Someone significant has died, and now you're about to learn what they have left behind for you. How did they want you to remember them? What have they entrusted to your care? What is your inheritance going to be?

I've never been a part of one of those movie-like scenes where someone's last will and testament is read aloud before their family and friends. But I can imagine the tension that those potential heirs might feel as they wait to hear the news. Some might be greedily awaiting large sums of money or valuables which could make them wealthy. Others are hoping for a specific item that holds personal significance, possibly a treasured family heirloom. And still others aren't looking for anything at all.

Usually somebody has to die in order for an inheritor to come into possession of what's being given over to them. That's part of the cost of becoming an heir. When someone makes the effort to establish a will, they're facing the reality that death comes for us all, understanding the adage of “you can't take it with you.” They're passing along gifts which they hope will be appreciated and used by the people they leave behind when their time on earth is done.

You've been given an inheritance. That's the message that we heard through a lawyer in today's reading from Galatians. St. Paul, an expert in the Law, is bringing news for his fellow Christians so they might be aware of the treasure that's been entrusted to them. You're one of them. You are an heir of the promise that God gave to His people, a people which includes Abraham and his descendants in faith, Hebrew and gentile alike. You're an inheritor of restored life with God.

You see, someone had to die in order to make possible the handing-over of what had been promised. And someone did. The Messiah who the Father sent to live in your place and to die on your cross: you're an heir to God's promises through him. And God wouldn't have it any other way.

You've been set free. You are no longer enslaved to a taskmaster or drill sergeant who's trying to get you to live up to some standard of perfection that you'll never meet. You don't have to pin your hopes on how well you perform to be good enough for God. You don't have to try to be “better” than the people around you in order to win His love. The enemy wants you trapped, saying that you have to rely on yourself. **God says otherwise.** Paul puts it this way: “*In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. ⁴But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*” (Galatians 3:3-5) You've inherited freedom in Christ. You've been freed from your own performance. You've been freed from slavery to self and sin and death.

Your freedom sets you apart from all the people in the world who don't yet know God's love through His Son – not making you to be “better” than anyone else, but making you to be a light of freedom to a world of people who are still trapped. You reflect God's grace into their lives. You carry the promise to them through your presence, your words, and your actions. The same inheritance that was entrusted to you is infinite enough to go to them, too.

The one who died so that you could come into possession of your inheritance? He defeated death. You are and heir of the living God. But with Jesus' resurrection, the gift that you've been given isn't pulled back or diminished; rather, it just keeps growing.

This is what we're celebrating in this season of the year after Pentecost, “the time of the Church.” The freedom that God gives us in Christ is meant to be nurtured and shared among us and with the neighbors God puts around us. We need it, especially in this culture where division and isolation have been on the rise. As Paul reminds the Galatians, in the body of Christ, the Church, we are not to be divided Jew and gentile, not rich and poor, not black and white, not Democrat and Republican – for we are united by baptism by the working of the Holy Spirit. No one is superior to another. The Spirit's work, not our own, bridges the gaps that would keep us apart. And in this time where people are continually compelled to compare themselves with each other and pitted against manufactured standards of perfection, our Lord's cross stands as the shelter in the storm where all may gather because he was perfect for us. You and I have new life that people who have yet to know God's love in Christ desperately need. This is your inheritance, by God's grace.

God generously gives great gifts through His Church to build you up and equip you so that you might be a blessing to those around you and those who come after you. Starting this weekend, for example, St. John's Prayer Ministry Team is offering a Sunday morning course on the God's gift of prayer – come and learn more about how prayer will strengthen you as an inheritor of God's grace in Christ. Gather together with your fellow heirs in the Church in small groups to engage with God's Word. As we heard today through the prophet Isaiah, God is calling out to people, both Hebrew and gentile, calling out through that Word, saying, "Here am I, Here am I!" Biblical illiteracy is a sign that all's not well; it shows that we're not making use of that which God has entrusted to us as heirs. Do not neglect the good gifts that God is setting before you here in this congregation and this community in Christ.

What's your legacy going to be? What would you pass on to your inheritors? If you're a parent or caregiver, how are you showing your children's God love? What's your example teaching them? When they look at your life – and they do! – will they see faith as your foundation? Point them to Jesus by showing that your priorities are guided by the hope which God gives you. And even if you're not a parent, you're still able to leave a legacy in faith. As Jesus told his disciples, "*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*" (Matthew 5:14-16)

You have freedom through the Father's love. Jesus has redeemed you to be his own. The Holy Spirit has called you and united you as His people. You are an inheritor of God's grace!

Amen.

ⁱ Passage for memory:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. – Galatians 4:4-5