



SERMONS THAT WORK

Pentecost 7 Proper 11 (A)

Inheritance

**[RCL]: Genesis 28:10-19a; Psalm 139: 1-11, 22-23 or Wisdom of Solomon 12:13, 16-19;
Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30,36-43**

We all inherit our lives - which is to say, there are things about us that are “given.” The very traits and narratives and worlds we occupy, by and large, were neither earned nor achieved. They were given. There is very little we can do about some of our inheritance: there’s our genetic code, passed down and married in us from our two biological parents. This genetic code gets played out and performed through the color of your eyes, the saturation of your voice, the length of your limbs, those cells predisposed or not toward breast cancer, the gait of your walk.

This bodily inheritance is, of course, complex; its expression refracts and morphs depending on one’s life circumstances: the food we have access to, the trauma we live through, our educational opportunities, and more. Our creaturely and bodily inheritance is given, yes, but they also ebb and flow, flex and rest, depending on where we find ourselves and who we find ourselves with.

But we’ve also inherited so much more than our bodies. We’ve inherited her way of dealing with that grouchy cashier – we speak softly and a bit more slowly and keep steady eye contact. We’ve inherited the patterns of anxiety we saw our dad inhabit – we retreat inwardly whenever there’s a threat to our ego near or far. We’ve inherited the scaffolding of an unjust society – if we’re white, we have inherited all sorts of hidden incomes from years of segregation and racist policies. We’ve inherited our love for the Cubs or our obsession with symphonies or the generational pain which never was fully healed.

We are, in so many ways, heirs. Heirs to all sorts of stories and all sorts of endings. Heirs to our parents and heirs to a world melting from our consumption.

And this creaturely inheritance is both gift and curse, as you may know well yourself. It both offers us the experience of life itself and yet comes with many, many broken tablets, a number of eaten apples, and plenty of shattered dreams. Our basic human inheritance is one of blessing and one of curses.

It turns out, our Christian inheritance is sort of similar, though maybe a better word for “curses” is “suffering.” The inheritance we have access to through Christ is ultimately the greatest gift, the most incredible story we could belong to, and yet it does not come without its sacrifices or its suffering.

In his letter to the Christ-followers in Rome, Paul says, “When we cry, ‘Abba! Father’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.”

Paul has spent a large portion of Romans explaining to the gentile Christ-believers that they do not have to follow Torah to escape God’s wrath, but instead, they need faith in Christ and the power of the Spirit. The Spirit is Paul’s key for gentile Christ-believers: one must have the Spirit! The Spirit, then, as he makes obviously clear in this eighth chapter of Romans, is the one who reveals our inheritance. She uncovers the gifts of heirship within our very beings.

Like a broom dusting the residue off neglected chests and baseboards, she goes about her work restoring us. It’s often gentle, quiet work that we hardly notice. That is, until we see the glint of silver hardware flickering in the light. What was once dull now shines.

The Spirit’s work is like that of a gold miner, sifting for gold in a cold and murky stream. She is certain the gold is there and so she is faithful to her work. She does not stop sifting and buoyantly rejoices when she finds that fleck of gold in the bottom of her pan. What was once hidden is now revealed.

But what does the Spirit testify to, within our very selves, that help us to see that we are children of God? What is the fleck of silver? The glint of gold?

Paul doesn’t give specifics, but might you know? Maybe you’ve had an experience where the Spirit has shown you with utmost clarity that you are God’s beloved child.

When that anxiety starts speaking inside your head, saying that you’re not enough, you’re an abysmal failure, you’re the problem - then something or someone wells up inside you, countering with the much calmer and more powerful “You are loved. You are a child of God. You are an heir of the kingdom.”

What about all those times when you participated in some large inequitable system because it was convenient? Did the Spirit not ask you to consider to whom you belong? And if you belong to God, might you want to make a different decision with your money, your time, your life? Does the Spirit not also ask you to consider the belovedness in others?

What about the small – almost unnoticeable – happenings of conversion, where your heart shifted slightly? Where it opened just a bit more fully? Did you not then hear the Spirit saying, “You are an heir with Christ, let me help you along this way”?

The beauty of inheritances is that we are not the originator of them. An inheritance, at its most basic, is pure gift. There are so many responses to gifts: we can feel sheepish and embarrassed by their lavishness, we can embrace them, we can give thanks for them, we can run from them, we can honor them.

The Spirit is doing everything in her power to help us honor and live into our inheritance. To claim our place as children. The Spirit is working to testify within us and to us – and then to the world – that we have an inheritance that is greater, more unfathomable, more stunning than any other in the world. This is *not* to say that it is exclusive, but it *is* exceptional.

It is an inheritance that heals and redeems and makes new our other inherited stories along the way. It is not an instantaneous inheritance: creation is still groaning; we are still groaning. And yet it is our greatest hope, our surest joy: that at a time yet to come, our own sufferings and struggles and confusions will be laid bare before God. And in the presence of the Almighty One, we will be healed. The ravaged earth will be loved back into wholeness. The stories of our trauma, somehow, no longer come to mind. The endangered species yet again flourish. Our cancerous cells and systems will be reformed. Those who have been in bondage unjustly will be liberated. Our anxiety will be dispelled. Our God will reign.

And as God reigns and God's glory is revealed, we will see that we are beloved children. This is our inheritance: that we don't have to be God; that we are wanted; that we are loved. And when you look in the mirror, maybe you'll see, however dimly, God's eyes, God's warmth, God's fiery passion, God's brimming love – for you are a child of God, you are beloved, you are part of the family.

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