5-6/7-17 Rev. Amy Haines

1 Peter 1:3-9 A Godly Inheritance

When my Grandma Palmer hit her mid-80s, she began to give away her family heirlooms and special keepsakes as Christmas gifts to each member of the family. Expensive ceramic bowls, souvenirs from Japan, special wall prints—all were given as presents, complete with handwritten stories of why they were meaningful.

Grandma would joke that she was giving away our inheritance so that we would never fight over anything when she was finally gone. By the time of her death at almost 91 years young,

the only things of value that Grandma had kept were a few rare coins, a few family rings, and a bunch of family photos.

I cannot even begin to imagine what it would be like to inherit a lot of money, or property, or really valuable items. My most cherished heirlooms have more sentimental than monetary value, such as my Grandpa Beatty’s Bible, my Grandma Palmer’s desk, and a love for the Lord that sustained us all.

Think about what you have inherited from your family members. Some of it may be valuable possessions, such as money or stocks or real estate. Some of it may be intangible influences, such as unspoken values or learned patterns of relationships or what defines love. Some of what you inherited you may wish you did not have, such as health issues or fears or dysfunctional family dynamics. Some of what you inherited may be just plain junk, including storage bins or garages full of broken Christmas lights and rickety furniture. Material possessions we may covet and cleave to, but they can be here today and gone tomorrow, as evidenced by tsunami and tornado, stock market fluctuations and foreclosures. Facial features, values and patterns of relationships may all be handed down from our families, but all can also be changed over time.

The greatest inheritance we can pass down from generation to generation is an abiding love for the Lord, evidenced in an active Christian faith that permeates not only what we do on a Sunday morning but also what we do and say every day of the rest of the week. Children will model the faith they see lived out at home, however much or however little. Faith is truly caught more than it is taught. And the earlier faith is caught, the deeper our faith foundation can be formed.

This morning our Scripture reminds us of this great and godly inheritance that we are each called to live by and share with others—a spiritual inheritance that is both for this life and for eternal life.

First Peter proclaims:

“By God’s great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (v 3-5)

What vivid adjectives to describe our godly inheritance!

Imperishable means uncorruptible, undamaged, never ending. Our imperishable inheritance will hold up better than stainless steel or titanium and will outlast even the sun, moon and universe.

Undefiled means untainted, 100% pure, will never spoil. Even the power of sin cannot invade it and the devil cannot change it.

Unfading means never diminishing, never losing quality, never fading over time. Like perennial flowers that will survive from season to season; our unfading inheritance will never wilt away into nothing, but will be as glorious and brilliant from the beginning to the end of time.

A godly inheritance, unlike our possessions in this world, will never perish, spoil or fade away!

That is God’s promise to us. That is God’s inheritance for God’s people—salvation for this life and for the life to come.

Never stolen, never washed away, never given to someone else instead of us—God’s spiritual inheritance is for each and every one of us simply because God loves us! God claims us through the waters of baptism. God forgives us through his Son’s blood on the cross. God renews our hope through the power of the empty tomb.

Yet how many leave this spiritual inheritance unclaimed?

Each year in every state thousands of dollars of unclaimed funds never go to the proper recipients. Some do not know the funds are waiting on them. Many more do not take the time to work through the paperwork to claim their funds.

Look around your neighborhood on a Sunday morning. How many of your neighbors leave their spiritual inheritance unclaimed? They may be the most generous, the most moral or even the kindest person in your neighborhood, yet without faith in Jesus they leave a great spiritual inheritance unclaimed.

How many of us still leave our spiritual inheritance unclaimed? We may worship together on a Saturday night or Sunday morning. We may serve the community in the name of Jesus. Yet still there is something holding us back from placing our faith in Jesus as our crucified and risen Savior and Lord.

The letter of 1 Peter encourages us to lay claim to the good news of Jesus.

“Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we’ve been given a brand-new life and have everything to live for, including a future in heaven—and the future starts now! God is keeping careful watch over us and the future. The Day is coming when you’ll have it all—life healed and whole.”

What a godly inheritance! A brand new life and a living hope; a future home in heaven and an imperishable, undefiled and unfading inheritance!

Yet 1 Peter continues, encouraging us in faith even to this day:

"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving (*present tense*) the goal of your faith (*and what is that?*) the salvation of your souls."

We love someone we have never seen; we daily speak to someone we do not hear aloud. We are strongest when we are weakest and richest when we are poorest. We die so that we might live and give away so we can keep. We see the invisible, hear the inaudible, and know that which is beyond knowledge.

 --David Leininger leiningers.com “Party Time!” 4-7-02 quoting A.W. Tozer

For all this, we rejoice! Death and sin and struggle do not have the final word—God does!

And God’s word is full of life and restoration and wholeness and salvation.

God’s living hope also give us a different perspective with which to approach the struggles of this life. We trust in God’s promise of eternal life. We also trust that God is with us in our struggles. This is good news that we can all take with us wherever we go!

..Author Leo Buscaglia tells a story about his mother and their "misery dinner."

It was the night after his father came home and said it looked as if he would have to go into bankruptcy because his partner had absconded with their firm's funds. His mother went out and sold some jewelry to buy food for a sumptuous feast. Other members of the family scolded her for it. But she told them that "the time for joy is now, when we need it most, not next week." Her courageous act rallied the family.

 -- Christopher News Notes, August, 1993 on sermonillustrations.com:joy

In this life, in the here and now, there will be times when we struggle, times when we suffer,

either because of life’s circumstances or because of persecution for our faith.

Bad things do happen to good people. Much wrong has been done under the name of Christianity. And the more polarized our society becomes, the more rigid people become in their way being the only way, the harder it becomes to follow a risen Savior that others do not believe in.

The first generation of Christians living in the Roman Empire were heavily being persecuted because of their faith. They were often seen as a sect within a sect, and ridiculed when they lived in counter-cultural ways by following the ways of Jesus. Those who were not Roman citizens were outcasts among outcasts.

So the letter of 1 Peter encouraged them, and encourages us today, to never give up hope,

to stand firm in faith, and to grow in the Christian life, boldly clinging to such an inheritance and such a joyous promise as the salvation of our souls.

We can also learn about this hope in suffering

..from the prisoners in the POW camp at the end of World War II.

The emaciated inmates, though weak from starvation, dehydration, and disease, one morning broke into shouts of joy and laughter. It seems that one of the prisoners had a primitive radio hidden away and that morning heard the news that the war was over. Even though they were still in prison and their circumstances today were no different from yesterday, they could now endure the suffering because they KNEW the victory had been won.

-- David Leininger leiningers.com “Salvation” 4-14-96 quoting

Erwin Lutzer, How to Have a Whole Heart in a Broken World

As Christians we not only look forward to that day when we go home to God for eternity,

but we also give thanks for God’s presence with us in the here and now that calls us to transformation in this life.

Jesus amazingly said that “the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these.” Today we have God’s presence and power with us through the Holy Spirit in our daily lives, a power that guides the healing and wholeness of our lives and the transformation of the world around us in the name of Jesus. This is not just power given to the great evangelists and mega-church pastors. This is power given to all of us who claim the name of Jesus. This power is a gift from God to live for him daily, to intentionally do those “greater works” of Jesus guided by the Holy Spirit. Never believe that you are too young or too old for such power to work within and through you.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was encouraged by the promise of God’s presence and power when he sought to preach the gospel message across England. One excerpt from his diary declares:

..Sunday, A.M., May 5 Preached in St. Anne’s. Was asked not to come back anymore.

Sunday, P.M., May 5 Preached in St. John’s. Deacons said “Get out and stay out.”

Sunday, A.M., May 12 Preached in St. Jude’s. Can’t go back there, either.

Sunday, A.M., May 19 Preached in St. Somebody Else’s. Deacons called special meeting and said I couldn’t return.

Sunday, P.M., May 19 Preached on street. Kicked off street.

Sunday, A.M., May 26 Preached in meadow. Chased out of meadow as bull was turned loose during service.

Sunday, A.M., June 2 Preached out at the edge of town. Kicked off the highway.

Sunday, P.M., June 2 Afternoon, preached in a pasture. Ten thousand people came out to hear me.

-- Homileticsonline.com 3-30-08 “This Might Hurt”

What incredible hope and promise we have been given, for this life and for eternal life!

What a godly inheritance of faith we can claim and rely on as we seek to live a Christian life!

We have a living hope in and through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.

Imagine how dismal life would be without any hope for tomorrow.

..In the late 1940s there was a town named Flagstaff, Maine that had lost all hope. The town was to be flooded, as part of a large lake for which a dam was being built. In the months before it was to be flooded, all improvements and repairs in the whole town were stopped. What was the use of painting a house if it were to be covered with water in six months? Why repair anything when the whole village was to be wiped out? So, week by week, the whole town became more and more bedraggled, more gone to seed, more woebegone.

"Where there is no faith in the future, there is no power in the present."

--Halford E. Luccock, Unfinished Business. Adapted Sermonillustrations.com:hope

Contrast that with a true story from Parade magazine of self-made millionaire Eugene Land, who greatly changed the lives of a sixth-grade class in East Harlem. Mr. Lang had been asked to speak to a class of 59 sixth-graders. What could he say to inspire these students, most of whom would drop out of school? He wondered how he could get these predominantly black and Puerto Rican children even to look at him. Scrapping his notes, he decided to speak to them from his heart. "Stay in school," he admonished, "and I'll help pay the college tuition for every one of you." At that moment the lives of these students changed. For the first time they had hope. Said one student, "I had something to look forward to, something waiting for me. It was a golden feeling." Nearly 90 percent of that class went on to graduate from high school.

 --Parade Magazine. Sermonillustrations.com:hope

As we have a godly inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading for this life and for all eternity, we are called today to do more than just simply go through the motions of Christianity—we are called to actively, passionately, steadfastly live out what we believe.

If you won a million dollars would you hide it under your bed or make life better for yourself and those around you? If you receive a cherished heirloom would you carelessly toss it aside or proudly display it and take great care with it?

Friends, we have been given a great and godly inheritance, the salvation of our souls, and we are called to live out what we believe on a daily basis, proclaiming that Jesus is the way and the truth and the life.

What we have seen of God’s actions in the past and what we have heard of God’s promises for the future will transform our lives in the present.

Think about those first disciples. When Jesus died, they hid behind locked doors, in fear for their lives. But after the resurrection, they were emboldened by the Holy Spirit to share what they had experienced, to tell others the good news that God loves us so much he sent his Son to die for us, and not only did he die for our sins but he rose from the dead and offers us an eternal inheritance in the glory of heaven.

We here this morning have not seen Jesus with our own eyes, yet we still believe and love him.

We, too, are called to rejoice and share with joy the good news of our spiritual inheritance, by living it and proclaiming it and offering it to others. We are called as followers of Jesus to find the practical ways to live out our membership vows of prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness, to stick our necks out for the good news of the gospel.

As an old saying goes, A turtle travels only when it sticks its neck out.

-Induk Pahk, The Wisdom of the Dragon 70. In Homiletics 4-11-99 “Keep Your Fork”

What is one way you can live for Christ this week? This week is there one person with whom you can briefly share your story of how Christ has made a difference in your life in the here and now? How is your life a witness to the hope of the resurrection?

We have been offered the greatest inheritance ever- the salvation of our souls through faith in Jesus as our crucified and risen Lord and Savior.

May we embrace this inheritance, may we confess our faith in Jesus, may we commit to living a Christ life of love and service, may we trust in God’s promise and presence to guide us no matter where our journeys of life take us.

May the genuineness of our faith result in praise and glory and honor to Christ Jesus in this life and in the life to come.

May it be so.

Let us pray.