

Promised Inheritance

I invite you to picture a scene you've watched unfold in the movies and on TV. Maybe you've even experienced it in real life.

There's been a death. And the family has gathered in the attorney's office for the reading of the last will and testament. There may be a spouse. There may be siblings. There may be adult children, young adult grandchildren, and various assorted nieces and nephews. Each one wondering: *What did the dear departed leave me?* Could it be real estate? A car? Jewelry? Certificates of deposit? Annuities? Mutual funds? Stocks and bonds? In this scenario, the heirs have had to wait to find out what's been bequeathed until *after* the maker of the will has passed away. They don't know in advance what they're going to inherit.

But in today's reading from John's Gospel, disciples of Jesus are given this information *ahead* of time. On the night before Jesus' death, he has a heart-to-heart talk with these who have been like family to him. Jesus has a long conversation with

his closest friends. And in this conversation, he offers them his last will and testament. He tells his followers what he's leaving them.

On this night, Jesus' disciples have begun to understand that he's going away. In that upper room, they've begun to feel the anxiety, the sadness, the despair, the sense of aloneness they'll experience when he's no longer with them.

And Jesus knows what they're feeling. Somehow, he always knows. Maybe that's why, in this same conversation with them, Jesus promises: *I will not leave you orphaned.*

Now an orphan is someone who has lost both parents. An orphan is someone who may feel alone in a way that he or she never has before.

Not long ago, I was talking with a woman whose father had died some years ago, and whose mother recently had passed away as well. She told me that, without either of her parents, being in the world now feels strangely different to her.

Many of us here today no longer have our parents with us. Maybe you, too, have experienced a sense of aloneness. In our culture, this feeling of being on one's own is not uncommon.

For we live in a society that insulates and isolates us from others. Neighbors used to *visit* with one another on front porches and chat across back fences. That doesn't happen so much anymore. Some of us—especially in urban and suburban areas—no longer know our neighbors' names. We've become somehow cut off from one another.

Do you think that could be partly because we've gotten so high-tech? Many sit at solitary computers, or carry mobile electronic devices and focus on them wherever they go. They e-mail. They text. They Instagram and they tweet. They don't see one another's faces. They don't hear one another's voices. For some, social media have taken the place of actual face-to-face contact with other human beings. And what often results is a feeling of aloneness.

But Jesus wants you to know that you're not going to be alone. He speaks words of reassurance. *I'm not going to leave you orphaned. I'm not going to leave you desolate. Trust me when I tell you that I'm coming back to you. Obey my commandments. Keep my words. That's how you can show it—if you truly do love me,* says Jesus.

For it's God's good intention that human communities live in love for one another and for God in Christ Jesus. It's God's perfect will we live in a love that mirrors the mutual love, the communal love, the circle of love that is Father, Son, and Spirit.

This Spirit is the One who is sent by the Father in the name of the Son. To all who love Jesus and are loved by God, Jesus promises the coming of the Spirit. The Spirit of God. The Spirit of Christ. The Spirit of Holiness. In the Gospel's Greek, the Spirit is One *who comes alongside*.

The One who comes alongside *you*. Who dances into your life and stays beside you. Who never abandons you, no matter what happens. Who is your Advocate. Your Counselor—your counselor for the defense! The Spirit is the One who pleads your case. Who goes to bat for you. Who intercedes for you.

The Holy Spirit—in the words of one of our affirmations—is *the divine presence in [your life]*. The One who keeps you *in perpetual remembrance of the truth of Christ*. The One in whom you *find strength and help in time of need*.

Truly, the Holy Spirit is your Helper. Your Companion. And the One who reminds you of everything Jesus, that Master Teacher, has taught throughout his earthly ministry. Now—today

—everything you need to learn on your journey of faith, Christ's Spirit teaches you.

And with great power, the Spirit convicts you. Guides your feet on the path you walk. Urges you. Encourages you. Prods and prompts and nudges you to do things you've never done before—wondrous deeds you may have dreamed of doing but never imagined you'd be able to actually do. God's Spirit gives you words to speak that you might never have thought of or dared to say on your own. Enables you to speak these words with passion and with boldness.

Even in the midst of the world's chaos. For Christ has promised to leave you peace. *His* peace! The peace of Christ is a peace of quiet courage in fearful times. The peace of Christ is a peace of comfort when your heart is troubled. The peace of Christ is a peace that the world can't give. For the peace of Christ is not undergirded by a false sense of security. The peace of Christ is not a precarious peace. The peace of Christ is not a temporary absence of conflict in a world that wages war.

The peace of Christ is so much more! The peace of Christ is a confident hope and a calm assurance. When the peace of Christ is in your innermost places, your center holds strong. No

matter how fast life comes at you. No matter how crazily the world spins around you. As a follower of Jesus Christ, you have that peace. The peace you're invited to share with your brothers and sisters this Sunday.

When, looking back from this side of Easter, the church reads an account of a time *before* Jesus' death and resurrection. In the Gospel, we hear his promises of an inheritance for all who love him. We hear his promises of an inheritance for his first disciples—and for you and me. We hear his promises. We are heirs. And we celebrate!

For we are Easter people. By Easter people around the earth—and by us!—this inheritance has been received. Everywhere, in communities of resurrection faith, these grace-filled promises have been fulfilled. Christ's promise of peace. Christ's promise of his own Spirit. And Christ's promise of presence. For Christ who has promised is faithful!

And he has promised to come to you. On this day, he keeps that promise! As you gather at his Table of Grace, in the deep, deep mystery of our faith, the Spirit makes him present—really present. Coming to you in the bread and in the wine. Blessing you. Filling you.

Coming to dwell in you—Christ Jesus and the One who sent him and the Spirit of Love. Coming to dwell *with* you. Coming to make their home with you. Today, tomorrow, and forever. Be glad and sing for joy!

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.