

1 Peter 1:3-9      The Goal of Our Faith  
April 16, 2023

We have heard from the gospel and the psalter this morning. The epistle reading is from First Peter. We will also hear from it today. It speaks of inheritance. It was about a year ago that my father died. He grew up the son of a pipe fitter, who, especially in the war years, traveled around looking for work. This search brought the family to Ohio for a spell, a little town called Clyde, up near Sandusky.

Given that my other grandfather, whom I never met, was a sharecropper, it is not surprising that neither one of my parents received an inheritance from their parents. The concept of inheritance may seem a little boring for a sermon, but for someone who has just received one. albeit modest.

Inheritance has lost some of its luster these past 200 years or so. In a previous age, it had a great deal of importance. Kings and other people of power inherited their realms. People at “lower” levels were also born into their station in life. There was not much “social mobility.” One of the many changes of the “modern” era, is that what one inherits no longer carries as much significance as it once did. Generally speaking, this change is seen to be a good one.

Most of the world no longer uses it to choose its leaders. People who come from stations in life that previously lacked power and wealth, can now ascend

to wealth and power much more easily, and leave modest inheritances.

Sadly, it bears mentioning that the journey to this new situation has not been as fair as it could be. Racial and other minorities still lag behind. Nevertheless, I am sure my father would have laughed out loud 40 years ago if he had been told there would be leftovers for his children.

The bible speaks of inheritance often. The psalmist writes in the 16th psalm, “Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.” The image is of a secure and pleasing earthly life.

We noticed in the Lenten study how the right of the firstborn sons is not well-received, the younger sons were almost always chosen over the older. Even Passover, the great springtime Jewish festival, was about the death of all the firstborn sons.

On the other hand, Jesus is presented as God’s firstborn. In some cases the emphasis is on the idea that Jesus is the *only* begotten son. In other places, the wild and ridiculous, and also amazingly wonderful claim is made that we are co-heirs with Christ, making Christ the firstborn among many. There is implied, a different understanding of what inheritance means.

By the time of 1 Peter, we read of this new kind of inheritance,

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.”

It is our task in this Easter season, to consider the ways in which our eternal inheritance affects our earthly lives. What does it mean to have a heavenly inheritance in this down-to-earth world?

Some might say that it doesn’t mean anything. At the very least, it means that after making our way through this life, however we can, through good and bad, thick and thin, any sense of eternity begins at death, when we leave all this behind, this life has no grace in it, but is cold and brutally difficult, and then it ends. They might sound a little like the author of Ecclesiastes, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”

Or one might say that this life is a test, like what happened to Job, and whether or not one can adopt and maintain faith in God determines the conditions of immortality. There is no other significance.

Still others may go in the opposite direction, claiming that *eternity* is of no real concern, but that the present

moment demands all our attention, and high character, for the successful confrontation with issues of justice and responsibility *in this life*.

We hear from Amos, “But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” Or Micah, “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” There is part of the truth in each of these ideas.

The modern organization of relationships, with its focus on equality and democracy, has diminished the role inheritance plays in the life of the world, and may lead us to seek a different metaphor.

Perhaps one might think of wages. Grace would mean that we have not been given the wages we have earned, but more; or of grades in school, which are earned like wages, and we have been given higher than what we earned. We have not been approached by an employer offering wages or a teacher giving instructions so that we can make a grade, nor an earthly inheritance.

It is grace that we have received. We have not been accepted because of anything associated with our earthly heritage, nor because by any achievement by which we earned anything. Rather by sheer grace. Easter is so magnificent that we forget that it is an assault on our pride, which causes us to want to deserve to be accepted. Whether in the previous age when inheritance meant more, or in the present age

when accomplishments means more, we are accepted only by God's free choice.

Furthermore, *this life* is proclaimed to be also a gift. *All of life is grace*, not merely the part beyond the grave, or that we find pleasing. Once again it is from 1 Peter that we are given help, "In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

The living of this present life, even the hard part, has been impinged upon by *eternity*, hallowing it and enhancing the experience of it. The signature component of Jesus' life was the sacrifice he made for others. We read in Romans, "I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God . . ."

And sacrifice means; kindness, graciousness, truthfulness, humility, courage in the face of despair and opposition, confidence in the face of doubt, and an undying concern for others that outweighs the more natural concern for the self. And finally, as we have learned from the Doubting Thomas story, it means have faith in Jesus. It is an inheritance of grace, and faith, and responsibility.

In view of these things, let Peter have the last word this morning;

"These have come so that the proven genuineness of your *faith*—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory

and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." 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 the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

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