

## WHAT JESUS LEFT BEHIND

Scriptures: John 14:15-24, 25-31

I am a week late, but I want to begin this morning with a story from Erma Bombeck's book *Motherhood: the Second Oldest Profession*. She tells about a mother who died of cancer leaving three sons, the youngest of which was 14. Before she died the mother wrote each of them a letter. To the oldest son, Chuck, she wrote,

Dearest Chuck:

Since this letter is for no one's eyes but yours, I can tell you that I always loved you best. Maybe it was because you were the first miracle to stir inside me. The first hint of my immortality. ... You may have suffered a bit from our inexperience with open pins, clumsy baths, and overprotection, but you got something better. You got our patience, our stamina, and our youth. ... You were six months of baby pictures and a set of encyclopedias. You were house calls for gas pains. You were strained lamb. You were the beginning. You were wanted and loved.

To her middle son, Steve, she wrote this letter:

Dearest Steve:

You must have suspected, but I will say it anyway. I have always loved you best. You drew such a stupid spot in the family and instead of caving in, you became all the stronger for it. ... You are the child we relaxed with and enjoyed. The one who made us realize that a dog could kiss you on the mouth and you wouldn't die from it. ... You took us away from tedium, rescued us from boredom, and stimulated us with your zest for life. You were the constancy and were loved.

Finally, to her youngest son, Tim, she wrote,

Dearest Tim:

A mother is not supposed to have favorites, but I have always loved you best. Just when your father and I thought youth had left our lives, you came along to remind us we had something left to give. ... With you we discarded the rules and experienced what a baby is all about. It was like seeing one for the very first time. ... I have loved you for your 35-year-old patience, your 90-year-old compassion, and your 50 year-old practicality, but mostly, I love the fourteen-year-old boy who wore them awkwardly, but proudly. You were the culmination and were loved.

After the funeral service, two women were talking at the back of the church. One said, "Didn't it just tear your heart out to see those young boys of hers without a mother?" The other replied, "I heard the medical bills took all they had. She didn't leave those boys a thing" (pp. 63-69).

Would you agree that she did not leave those boys a thing? I want you to think about that as we turn to the back of the bulletin and look again at John 14:15-27.

John 14 is a part of John's gospel called the "Farewell Discourses." John 13-16 is a long conversation Jesus had with his disciples at the last supper, the night before his crucifixion. The disciples will soon feel grief stricken and abandoned, just like the sons in Erma Bombeck's story. These chapters are like a final letter to the disciples before Jesus dies. What will he leave behind for them? What will he give them to help them keep going after he is gone?

In our scripture reading this morning there are four things that Jesus leaves behind for his disciples. You can fill them in on the blanks on the back of the bulletin. The first is his **word**. You can underline references to this starting in verse 15. Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Jesus mentions his commandments eight times in his last conversation with his disciples. His commandments—his word—is one of the most important things Jesus left behind for us. That point is made again in verse 23. Jesus says, "Those who love me will keep my word."

In the Monday *Spokesman-Review* on the comics' page there was a "Non-Sequitur" cartoon showing a man sitting in an office being interviewed for a job. The interviewer says to the man, "Well, you seem right for the job, but there's something your pastor said 7 years ago that bothers me. Let me read it to you out of context..."

You folks better start paying attention to my sermons. If you run for office, they may come back to haunt you. Actually, I hope they will come back to haunt you. Not because of what I say but what Jesus says. I hope Jesus' words will haunt you the rest of your life. When you are struggling with how to relate to someone in your family, I hope you will be haunted by Jesus' words: "This is my commandment, that you love one another." When you get caught up in fulfilling your own ambitions and have no time for the needs of others, I hope you will be haunted by Jesus' words: "This is my commandment, that you love one another." When you run for office, or even when you vote, I hope you will be haunted by Jesus' words: "This is my commandment, that you love one another." One of the most important things Jesus left us was his word.

The second thing he left us was us his **Spirit**, the Holy Spirit. You can circle references to this gift in verse 16-17: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth ...."

Sometimes people have the wrong idea about the Holy Spirit. They think the Holy Spirit is spooky, that it is a source of mysterious new revelations and secret truths that go beyond what we have in the Bible. But to see the primary purpose of the Holy Spirit, look at verse 26, which you can also circle. Jesus says, "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." The Holy Spirit is like our own personal attorney, or maybe better, our own personal counselor or case worker. The Holy Spirit reminds us of Jesus' word and Jesus' actions and helps us apply those words and actions things to situations in our daily lives.

By the way, almost everything that is said about the Holy Spirit in this chapter is also said about Jesus. Notice verse 16. Jesus says, "I will ask the Father, and he will send you *another* Advocate" (my emphasis). What does Jesus mean by "another" Advocate? He says "another Advocate" because he himself is our first Advocate. I John 2:1 says, "But if anyone does sin, we

have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” Jesus is an Advocate for us with God, and so is the Holy Spirit. In verse 17 Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the “Spirit of truth.” Earlier in chapter 14 Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” The Spirit embodies God’s truth just as Jesus does. In verse 26 we are told that the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, is sent by God. So is Jesus. The Holy Spirit is nothing less than the presence of Jesus with us today. The Holy Spirit is what allows us living 2000 years later to talk with Jesus, to be reminded of Jesus, and to be guided by Jesus, even though we cannot see him.

Third, Jesus leaves behind his **promise**. Verse 23 says, “Jesus answered him, ‘Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and [here is the promise] we will come to them and make our home with them.’”

Earlier in chapter 14 Jesus says, “In my Father’s house are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.”

Jesus does not go away and leave his disciples with nothing. He leaves them a promise to come back. He promises to make his home with us through the Holy Spirit, and at the same time he promises to take us home to be with him in God’s eternal kingdom.

By the way, did you notice in verse 23 how Jesus identified himself with God? He said, “My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.” When Jesus comes to us through the Holy Spirit, it is God coming to us. Do you see now how the Trinity works? No one has ever seen God, but Jesus is the one who shows us what God is like. Jesus is God with us, and the Holy Spirit is Jesus with us. Jesus showed us what God is like in human flesh, and the Holy Spirit shows us what Jesus is like in our lives today. That is what we call the Trinity.

This brings me to the fourth thing Jesus left behind: his **peace**. Here you can draw an arrow to verse 27: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.” This isn’t the kind of peace people feel when everything is going their way and they feel good about themselves. In John 16:33, near the end of the farewell speeches, Jesus says, “I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!” The peace that Jesus gives is not the knowledge that everything will go well for you. It is the knowledge neither death nor life nor anything in all creation can separate you from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now let me say a word to our graduating seniors this morning. What does this scripture mean to you? It means that what Jesus left behind for his disciples is what you can take with you wherever you go. His word, his Spirit, his promise, his peace—these gifts are portable. You can take them wherever you go. They are like the letters which the mother left to her three sons. Those who don’t know about the letters will think that the mother did not leave them a thing, but in her departing words she left them the most precious gift she could give. So did Jesus.

- Ken Onstot  
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