

A Brand-New Comforter

John 14:23-29

INTRODUCTION

Over the past six months, I have been meeting with a young couple who will hold their wedding ceremony in this sanctuary in about two weeks. In 13 days, actually. The bride is counting, so I want to be accurate.

As you know well, there is a moment in nearly every wedding ceremony where the bride and groom exchange rings. In the process of preparing them for their marriage, and sometimes in the actual ceremony itself, I explain the significance of those rings.

- I tell them that in earlier times monarchs wore rings that bore the symbols of their kingdoms, and they used those rings to seal the various treaties they negotiated.

The wedding ring today symbolizes something very similar. When brides and grooms place that ring on the fourth finger of the left hand, they pledge to faithfully live out their marriage vows.

- I tell them that moment will be the greatest gift they will ever give to another person. They are giving themselves to each other.

The Holy Spirit is but one of the many gifts that God has given to those who love Him and faithfully follow Him. It is probably wrong theology to say that the Holy Spirit is the “greatest” gift. That designation rightly belongs to God’s gift of Jesus.

- But it would be accurate to say that the Holy Spirit is a BRAND-NEW gift, given because of the resurrection of Jesus and given because God is making a pledge to those who will choose to follow Him.

This season – essentially this month of May – is the time in our Christian calendar when we talk about all things becoming new.

- This is what the prophet Isaiah foretold some 700 years before Jesus was born:

Be alert, be present. I’m about to do something brand-new. It’s bursting out!
Don’t you see it? (Isaiah 43:19, The Message)

Like the wedding ring, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, God pledges His love and commitment to us, in these three ways.

WAY #1: HE PLEDGES TO BE WITH US

In Deuteronomy 31:6, God speaks through Moses to tell His people:

Do not be afraid or terrified because of (the Amorites), for the Lord your God goes with you: He will never leave you nor forsake you. (Deuteronomy 31:6)

That is an important message for the disciples to hear. Jesus is about to leave them. In Him they have seen God in the flesh, dwelling right there in the midst of them. They ate with Him, walked with Him, talked with Him. But soon He will be gone.

- But in today's gospel text, Jesus tells them God is not abandoning them. It might feel like He is taking Jesus away. But in His place God is sending the Holy Spirit:

The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (John 14:26)

Jesus was visibly with them, but this Holy Spirit will be with them, too. But He will be with them in a different way:

The Father ... will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. ... You know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. (John 14:16-17)

With them and in them. Eternally ... and internally.

This is BRAND-NEW. Up to that moment in time, if the people wanted to be with God they had to go TO God at the Temple. But in this BRAND-NEW time, God comes to us.

- First in the bodily form of Jesus
- Now in the spiritual form of the Holy Spirit, who becomes a resident of the human heart.

Here is the key takeaway:

Not only does God want to be with you, He already is.

When you begin your walk of faith with Jesus, the Holy Spirit moves in. Eternally and internally.

WAY #2: HE PLEDGES TO GIVE YOU PEACE

The first point in this message had to do with God wanting to spend time with you. But the last two points make it clear that God wants to do more than just hang out. He wants to make a difference in your life.

Look at the text:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)

Peace is one of the most commonly used words these days. From the conflicts in the Middle East and the Ukraine, to the conversations happening with the NATO event in Dayton this week, to the turmoil on the streets of our cities (including our own community).

I like peace, don't you? Knowing that the Holy Spirit brings us peace makes this BRAND-NEW GIFT extra special.

- When the world talks about peace, though, it talks about ending conflict.
- That's not the peace of Jesus.

In fact, Jesus tells us that there will always be conflict:

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

It is a peace even in the middle of the storms.

Since the beginning of time, mankind has craved peace! When Adam and Eve came upon the body of their son Abel, slain by his brother Cain, they no doubt longed for peace. First there was the confrontation with Satan in the garden, then this. Can there be no peace?

And so it has been ever since that time, peace has eluded man for the most part and bloodshed has been his lot ever since. The peculiar thing about peace is this; man has always longed for the time when peace was in his life—yet peace has so seldom reigned in the hearts of men, it is doubtful that what he longs for has ever really been there in the first place. That which he craves is so foreign to his existence that, perhaps, the longing is more of a whim than it is a dream.

A former president of the Norwegian Academy of Sciences and historians from England, Egypt, Germany, and India have come up with some startling information: Since 3600 B.C. the world has known only 292 years of peace! During this period there have been 14,351 wars, large and small, in which 3.64 billion people have been killed. The value of the property destroyed would pay for a golden belt around the world 97.2 miles wide and 33 feet thick. Since 650 B.C. there have also been 1,656 arms races, only 16 of which have not ended in war. The remainder ended in the economic collapse of the countries involved. (Source Unknown.)

Remarkably, or maybe not so, in the last 5,400 years the world may have known peace for only a little over 5% of the time. And the odds are that most of that 5% was infused with thoughts and plans for disturbing the peace. Ironically, it has probably been man's misplaced longing for earthly peace that has for so long mired him in a lack of finding it.

A longing for earthly peace has often proved the catalyst for the blooming of war since in that longing God is so often relegated to second place. Only the knowledge that true peace, found only in Christ Jesus, gives real peace. This is the peace that "passes all understanding," the gift of the Holy Spirit, which puts our hearts and minds at peace 100% of the time.

Here's another key takeaway:

The Holy Spirit in me brings peace in me too.

WAY #3: HE PLEDGES TO GIVE US ETERNAL LIFE

In verse 17 Jesus calls the Holy Spirit:

... the Spirit of truth ... (John 14:17)

Here in our Gospel text this Spirit of truth leads us to know and understand the truth.

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (John 14:17)

Part of the truth the Spirit will teach us is found in verse 28:

You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you. (John 14:30)

Jesus is coming again. And when He does He will take all the faithful people with Him to heaven. This 14th chapter opens with those verses that you will often hear read at a funeral:

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going. (John 14:3-4)

Have you ever wondered – or maybe even struggled – with the issue of whether or not you have a home waiting for you in heaven?

- It is the job of the Holy Spirit to teach that truth to you.

Here's the key truth:

God does not want you to live your life in a fog of uncertainty. He wants to remove any doubt about what the Bible says. So He gives you the Holy Spirit.

APPLICATION

God knew what He was doing when He sent the Holy Spirit.

A man in North Carolina bought a new car with a voice-warning system. At first he was amused to hear the soft female voice gently remind him that his seat belt wasn't fastened. He affectionately called this voice the "little woman."

He soon discovered his little woman was programmed to warn him about his gasoline. "Your fuel level is low," she said one time in her sweet voice. Edwin nodded his head and thanked her. He figured he still had enough to go another fifty miles, so he kept on driving. But a few minutes later, her voice interrupted again with the same warning. And so it went over and over.

Although he knew it was the same recording, Edwin thought her voice sounded harsher each time. Finally, he stopped his car and crawled under the dashboard. After a quick search, he found the appropriate wires and gave them a good yank. So much for the little woman!

He was still smiling to himself a few miles later when his car began sputtering and coughing. He ran out of gas! Somewhere inside the dashboard, Edwin was sure he could hear the little woman laughing.

The Holy Spirit was given to us. We do well to listen to what He says.

Amen.