

Sealed by the Spirit

by Reverend Victoria Ney

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The old adage “time flies” certainly seems to be true these days! Pentecost was two weeks ago, and so much has happened since then. I feel as though we short-changed the meaning of Pentecost and talking about the wonderful Holy Spirit. I’d like to focus our meditation today on the power, strength, and presence of the Holy Spirit.

You know the Holy Spirit is the One who seals you in God’s family. Ephesians 4:30 says, “The Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” The Holy Spirit gives the blessing and has a role in securing us.

If you remember watching a Baptism, after I baptize the child (or adult) in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, I make the sign of the cross on their forehead and say, “Child of the Covenant, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ’s own forever.” It’s so very powerful, it almost always brings tears to my eyes. Think of it — sealed forever in the heart of God. Sealed forever in the heart of God. And nothing can ever change that.

I heard a story from the childhood of a minister I know. He said he was about 10 years old when his parents and grandparents worked out a plan where he would take a bus and visit his grandparents by himself. They worked out all the details. And, as you might imagine, his parents were going to put him on the bus and his grandparents would meet him at the end of the line. (Just thinking as a parent, Tim’s parents must have needed a break from him pretty badly!) Of course, Tim’s mother told him not to get off the bus or get lost or do anything stupid a million times. We probably wouldn’t do this these days — we know kids can get lost, do silly things, and, even horrible to think about—get snatched. But this was back in the 60’s and I think we were less frightened back then. As Tim was getting on the bus, his mom gave him a bunch of kisses. His dad folded up some money and a prewritten note and stuffed it in Tim’s pocket before giving him good-bye hugs.

So off Tim went. It was a three-hour bus ride, and Tim felt like he was a big boy on an adventure. About half way to his grandparents, Tim decided to look at the note his dad gave him. It said: This boy belongs to Jack Moore and then his address. If anything happened, Tim’s father wanted someone to know that Tim belonged to him and to return him to his family.

Guess what? God does the same thing for us. God has laid public claim on our lives. God says, “This child (this person) is mine.” God knows his “kids” can get lost. But God is not going to let evil get his grimy hands on you. He says, “This person belongs to me!”

That’s what is meant in Ephesians 1:13 when Paul writes: “In him you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance....”

It’s interesting to me that the Greek word Paul uses for “sealed” is in a verb tense that means accomplished already. You are not *being* sealed. It’s not something you’re *hoping for*... in the future. You are already sealed.

Sealing is important. We use phrases about “sealed” quite often. For instance, Seal of Approval, (in other words, “You have my support, my endorsement”), All sealed up (everything is safe), Seal the deal (it declares ownership. When the deal is sealed it says “This is protected. This is mine. It belongs to me.”)

You have been sealed to God’s care by the Holy Spirit. Nothing can take you away from God’s love.

In John's Gospel, Jesus said he was sealed by God. It says, "For on him, God the Father has placed his seal of approval." (John 6:29). Just like Jesus was sealed, we are, too. God first set his seal on Jesus. Now it's also on us. Do you think Jesus ever feared rejection by God? No, of course not!

You see this is our blessed gift from the Holy Spirit. This is our blessed assurance that we are sealed to God and that nothing and no one can ever break that seal.

I know that things can come along — like this pandemic, like other illness, like unemployment and worries about paying bills, like grief, like loneliness, like family and relationship issues, even violence. These things can take the joy from your heart or the spring from your step. But nothing can ever take you out of God's hand. You have been sealed.

Our eternal security is intact, because the Holy Spirit cannot fail. He wrote the note — This child is mine. We might stumble a little, here and there, now and then, but we are saved by grace. I'm so thankful that we have a loving Father, a great Savior and a powerful Spirit.

Will you pray with me?

Almighty God, Loving Lord, Holy Spirit, thank you for claiming us as your own and sealing us in your family. We often forget what a gift it is to belong to you. Sometimes routine blurs our prayers and tiredness or loneliness or fear sap our energy. O God, open up our lives and help us to let go of that which hinders our love for you and one another. Dissolve our foolish fears. Help us to grasp your strong hand and awaken us to the power of your Spirit. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.