

## Sermon 14 July 2024 Year B Ephesians 1:1-14 and Mark 6:14-29

Parish of Kingscliff

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I have here a press sealing wax onto a document.

When you press it down it makes an imprint in wax, clay, paper or some other medium. The purpose is to authenticate a document or secure it, such as to seal an envelope.

This one applies the seal of the Corporate Trustees of the Diocese of Grafton.

Episcopal seal - (bigger and heavier).

First the wax is placed onto the paper/document, then the handle is pushed down. On underside is a relief pattern or seal matrix of the CTs or Bishop's crest.

Bishop's seal is used to emboss the Crest onto a licence, such as a Rector's Licence, or letters of orders, deed of consecration of a church, deconsecration of a church, or a faculty.

CT's seal is used for any CT contracts, such as purchases or sale of property, or the granting of a lease of a property owned by the CTs, or a deed of release.

When Leanne and I finally paid off our first mortgage we were glad to be given the title deeds. These bear a mark from the Department of Lands which is a seal of their authority to issue deeds of title.

The seal press is kept safely by the seal owner who alone has the right to issue such licences, deeds or contracts.

In a similar way universities issue testamurs or degree certificates marked with their common seal as a sign that the qualification is genuine.

I mention this because today's scripture reminds us that all these meanings are found in the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian. God asserts that we are genuinely his.

I take as my key verse for this sermon today Ephesians 1:13 & 14.

*"In him you also were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory".*

In v.13 we're reminded that the HS is, 1<sup>st</sup> and foremost, a promise to us of God's presence with us; of his grace abiding in us.

As with a wax seal, God has signified his ownership of us by putting within us the seal of the Holy Spirit.

An important thing to note is that the seal of the Holy Spirit is not simply *an experience* of the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit himself.

This is an important point because for us as Anglicans we believe the sacrament is good and sufficient even if the person didn't "feel" like they had been touched or made different in any way. So an infant being baptised won't know they've experienced the Holy Spirit in Baptism, or an unconscious person won't know they've been touched by the HS through anointing. Yet they have been, and the sacrament has been administered and the HS has been present and sealed upon that person.

It's the same for you, even if you didn't get the "feel" or "experience" of the HS. Even if you can't remember it, or even you don't really believe it. As it says .... *In him you also were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit* (we might add "whether you knew it / believed it / felt it or not").

In v14 we read the word *pledge*:

*....this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory*

Some translations (eg the RSV) use the word *guarantee* instead, hence "... *the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it*".

The original Greek word 'arrabon' is translated as 'pledge' or 'guarantee' but equally it has the sense of *deposit, instalment or down payment*.

In other words the first part of the purchase price that secures a legal claim in the thing being acquired, thus making the contract of sale, real and valid. The first portion of the total bill. Financial overtones.

Expressing that through the presence of HS, God not only promises our *final* inheritance of eternal life with him, but gives us a foretaste of it in advance, in the person of the Holy Spirit.

In looking at Ephesians Chapter 1 in this way, we are in the territory of John Calvin, the great French protestant theologian from the time of the reformation. He wrote at a time when theologians such as Martin Luther were trying to seek a fresh understanding of the sacraments of the church and what they might mean for us as Christians.

In his thinking Calvin relied heavily on this passage in Ephesians that is before us today.

His understanding, though not Anglican, was attractive to later Anglican theologians when they formulated the Catechism that you might remember: “that sacraments are an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace”.

For Calvin the sacraments are an outward sign of this inward presence of the Holy Spirit within us: “sacraments are an outward sign by which the Lord seals on (us his) promises” (Institutes IV.xiv.1).

Calvin puts it plainly: “The sacrament is given in material form because we are human and reside in bodies; we need earthly reminders of God’s spiritual promises” (Institutes IV.xiv.2).

The author of Ephesians (possibly Paul) wrote to the Christians at Ephesus to encourage them in their Christian lives – to help them to be clear about their identity in Christ and about their role in God’s wider purposes. The seal showed they were owned and therefore protected by God, and the pledge assures them of eternal life which starts now.

Do we really believe that we are marked as God’s own, and that we should live now according to the values of that Kingdom?

John the Baptist was marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit – he was marked as God’s own. This seal or branding very much sealed his fate when it came to Herod’s thirst for power. Yet through his baptising of others he marked many as God’s own.

So this passage from Ephesians challenges us to acknowledge that we don’t just have *experiences* of the Spirit, but that the Spirit resides within us. We are God’s, not just at some future point, but now. Our relationship with the Spirit is the **foretaste** of eternal life with God. What are the implications of this?

I can think of a few that you might want to reflect on:

**Honouring** the presence of the Spirit within us is important – recognising that this is God’s promise of goodwill and graceful presence in our lives and bodies.

Honouring the Spirit's presence in this way means treating the HS as a real, **personal companion**. If someone lives with you and loves you, but you seldom talk to or listen to that person, you are wounding that relationship and grieving that person.

How do you honour the Spirit in your life? Do you see the Spirit as a real, personal companion you can talk to in prayer?

The Holy Spirit is just that: a Holy Spirit. God intends for everyone whom the Spirit indwells to **be holy**. This has implications for all our thoughts, words and actions.

Do you lead a pure life that is a testament to the Spirit's holiness?

Honouring the Spirit within us also means prizing and using the Spirit's **gifts** in us and in other Christians.

Do you acknowledge, celebrate and use the gifts the Spirit has given you, in order to contribute to the greater good of the Body of Christ, or do you hide them away?

We grieve the Spirit if we act as though our own **power** is enough to make things happen. We honour the Spirit when we depend on the HS's divine power to take us out of our comfort zones into something new.

Finally by participating in the **sacraments** we affirm this relationship with the Spirit of which the sacraments are a seal.