

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 10) – July 14, 2024

“¹³In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”

–Ephesians 1:13–14–

Kings and others of importance have used signet seals since ancient times. During the time of Saint Paul, they were still regularly used when sending letters. So what was the purpose of such seals, other than they looked really neat? Well, they served a practical purpose, and they were used in a number of ways.

First, it might seem to be the most obvious, seals were used when sending letters. Kings would use a signet ring and wax to seal a letter. It would ensure the letter was closed if it contained private information. But it also showed authenticity to the recipient. The recipient would know, based on the seal, who sent the letter.

Seals were also used to label possessions and show ownership. Growing up in Nebraska, I can remember ranchers branding their cattle. They do so to show that the cattle belong to them; they came from their ranch. At the beginning of every school year, I find myself labeling all my kids' school supplies and belongings. If one of my kids loses his/her crayons or lunch box, we have a better chance of it being returned to us because of the label.

Seals were used as a means of protection. Pontius Pilate ordered the soldiers to seal the tomb where Jesus would be buried following his crucifixion and death. Pilate was trying to protect the tomb. It was sealed with the Roman imperial seal, so as to deter thieves from trying to steal Jesus' body.

Paul says we are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, so what does that mean for us? It shows ownership. To whom do we belong? To Christ. It shows authenticity. We are genuinely God's child. We have been marked with the cross of Christ in our baptism. You could say, we've been "branded" as God's own child. And this seal offers us protection. We are sealed and marked by God, not with a visible sign, but a sign that shines through as we proclaim God's love for others and live our lives in accordance with God's will for us. God has given us a wonderful gift in his Holy Spirit.

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