

**The Great Promise©**

John 14:23-31

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In today's message, we are thinking about how memory can help us keep Jesus command. But, before we get into the meat of this message, shall we have a little fun?

How old are you when you start having memory lapses? I'm not talking about Alzheimers or dementia and I'm certainly not joking about those serious issues. But don't we all have times when we forget a name or we forget where we put something or what we were about to say, or what we came into the room for?

So ... A few elderly couples used to get together to talk about life and to have a good time. One day one of the men, Harry, started talking about this fantastic restaurant he went to the other night with his wife. "Really?", one of the men said, what's it called? After thinking for a few seconds Harry said, "what are those good smelling flowers called again?" "Do you mean a rose? the first man questioned. "Yes that's it," he exclaimed. Looking over at his wife he said, "Rose what's that restaurant we went to the other night?"

Patient: Doctor! I have a serious problem. I can never remember what I just said.

Doctor: When did you first notice this problem?

Patient: What problem?

Jesus said, "... 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." Thank goodness for the powerful memory boost we have in the Holy Spirit!

Last Sunday's text was a bit like this one, wasn't it? Jesus is talking to his disciples about his leaving them and is trying to assure them that it will be okay. Last week, he told them he was going away and they might try to find him but he would be nowhere in sight.

But now, in this chapter, he says that while he is going away, he will come back. This is the same chapter where he told them he is going to prepare a place for them in the Father's house.

I love these passages. They are full of an assurance and encouragement that we so often need in our stressful lives.

But, besides the assurance, Jesus also gives a command – he says to keep my word. If you love me, he said, you will carefully keep my word.

Gospel Question #1 What do you think Jesus' "word" is that he commands his disciples to keep?

Could it be that we heard it last week? Jesus said, “Love one another. This is how people will know you are a disciple. If you love one another.”

We remembered last week just what the 2 greatest commandments were, didn't we? The Shema from Deuteronomy 6 – To love God with all our hearts, souls, and might; and the second greatest – to love others as we love ourselves.

Thing is, if we were successful at doing those two things, we would not have to worry about anything else. If we love God with all our being, we will want to obey his word, right?

But, does anyone here ever forget who you are – or maybe I should say whose you are at times? Do you ever find yourself not loving others? Or even not thinking about or acting like you loved God? Do you ever find yourself putting yourself as god? It's doubtful that you really think, “I am god.” But when we are self-centered; when it's all about me; when all I think about is satisfying my current desire – I am putting myself above God.

So, what is the promise Jesus says he is sending? It is the promise of the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, that will live with us and in us, and that will remind us of what Jesus has said. If we love Jesus, we have that ever-present Spirit of God that constantly reminds us, draws us back to him.

Memory is such a good and sometimes holy thing, don't you think? I can't count the number of funerals I have presided over in the years I've been minister. But I know for sure that at every one of them, I have seen the gift of memory bring new life and a certain joy to a grieving family.

I always make it a point to spend time with the family, usually a day or two before the funeral. I prefer there to be as many family members gathered as possible and find it best, if it can be worked out, to meet in their home where they have pictures and things that remind them of their loved one.

Of course, they are all in grief and shock. There are tears and some are very quiet. But, I always ask for them to share some memories with me so that I can try to create a service that will be personal and not only give glory to God but that will celebrate the life of their loved one.

As they share stories, a new energy comes into the space we are in. Often times they have pictures to show me that go along with the story – pictures that are put into a beautiful slide show that will be shared at the service.

Laughter is heard even in the tears. And it is the same way at the visitation and again at the service. Memory can be healing. It can bring life and energy and some peace in the midst of a time that you would not think peace possible.

Ah, but Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

Gospel Question #2 In what way is Jesus' peace different than the peace the world gives? When have you sensed that peace in your life?

It seems odd, doesn't it, for Jesus to be telling his closest friends – his beloved disciples who have been with him through all the ups and downs of his ministry that, even though he is going to die and leave them, they will have peace.

And when you think about the horror that came right after that, as Jesus was arrested, interrogated, beaten and crucified as if he were the worst criminal – it's amazing to imagine how they could have any peace.

The disciples were terrified that they too would be found and killed.

Peace? How could that be?

Yet, it is a different peace than what we think of in this world. We tend to think of peace as being without conflict, without violence, without hatred. And we don't really find much of that kind of peace around, do we?

But Jesus' peace is what we have right in the midst of all the pain and suffering, all the grief, all the wars. It is a sense of being okay no matter what happens.

But how do we get that peace?

Did you notice in the promise Jesus gave that he said, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."

God makes his home with us by the presence of the Holy Spirit – the one Jesus promised. Isn't it true that there's no place like home? No matter how humble it is, we are always glad to get home where we can be comfortable, be ourselves, be loved by the people who know us best. And Jesus promises the Father and Jesus live there too. They are home with us. God knows us best; loves us best.

And the Holy Spirit gives us reminders – memory boosts – of what Jesus taught; of how God loves us; of how we love God.

And in that memory we live and breathe and have peace. The peace of Christ be with you. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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