

**Ephesians 1:11-23**  
**“Inheritance”**  
**November 4, 2007**  
**Year C: All Saints Sunday**  
**Linn Memorial UMC**

The subject of “inheritance” has been in the news recently—specifically the inheritance left by Leona Helmsley to those who were dear to her. How many of you have heard this story? Many of us probably remember Leona Helmsley—she was a very wealthy business woman out on the east coast who made her fortune through luxury hotels and real estate. She was especially well known in the 1980’s.

Well back in August of this year Leona Helmsley died. Her death was reported in the news, of course, but what really caught the attention of the public was the report a little after her death, detailing the contents of her will, and who would inherit what. It’s really a fascinating story.

You see, the individual who received the single largest portion of Leona Helmsley’s estate was her dog—a little white Maltese named “Trouble.” Trouble received a \$12 million trust to be used for his perpetual care. And when Trouble himself dies, he is to be buried right next to Leona in her mausoleum. Trouble has actually made no public comment about the inheritance, but he has since been seen with his tail wagging, so people assume that he is pleased.

What makes this story really interesting, however, is who else received what from Leona Helmsley’s estate. Two of her four grandchildren received \$5 million each, and her other two grandchildren received nothing. And so, if you’re doing the math, that means that Leona’s four grandchildren combined received less than what went to Trouble the dog. I hear the local United Methodist Church has since

nominated the dog for a position in the church council in the hopes that he will start to tithe.

Now, I really am not telling that story to poke fun at Leona Helmsley. Maybe there were some real, substantive issues with her grandchildren. Maybe her dog really was the greatest dog ever. And in all fairness to her I should point out that she left the vast majority of her wealth to charity.

No, I tell that story simply to make the point that inheritances can be a big deal. When a billionaire leaves \$12 million to her dog and nothing to two of her grandchildren, people take notice. Folks get really worked up over inheritances—and dogs can too, apparently. Families can split and fracture over inheritance. In fact, Jesus tells a parable in which people are even willing to kill over it.

All of which leaves us with the impression that a person's inheritance can be a very precious thing. So when the author of today's reading from Ephesians talks about our "inheritance" as Christians, chances are pretty good that we're about to hear something that is very important.

Now, nobody knows for sure when and where the book of Ephesians was written—or even who wrote it, for that matter, though tradition connects it with the Apostle Paul. We do know where the city of Ephesus is, which gives us the word "Ephesians." It's in modern-day Turkey. It used to be a coastal city, but centuries of changing coastlines have pushed it a few miles inland. And, of course, we know what the book itself says. More than anything else, the book of Ephesians is about helping Christians realize that they are part of something cosmic—that they are a part

of God's work to do nothing less than transform the world through the person of Jesus Christ.

And as part of God's cosmic work to transform the world, Ephesians tells us that we Christians have received a glorious inheritance. Our passage today in fact talks about our inheritance of faith no less than three times. Only the inheritance is not what most of us probably imagine when we think of "inheritance." It isn't an estate, or a fortune, or a boat, or a house, or even trust fund for a dog. No, the inheritance Ephesians talks about is much simpler, and much more precious: our inheritance as followers of Christ, Ephesians tells us, is simply to live for the praise and the glory of God. That's what it says right there, in verse 12: our inheritance is the opportunity to live for the praise of God's glory.

Now, at first we might hear that and be tempted to ask, "what kind of inheritance is that—the opportunity to live for God's glory and God's praise? What about the \$12 million that little white Maltese received? Why can't our inheritance be something like that?"

But in a way that's kind of the point. Our inheritance as Christians is not like the inheritance we normally think of. It's not stuff we can touch and feel and hold onto. Our inheritance isn't made up of things we can use for ourselves, to make our lives more comfortable or successful or great. No, like every other single one of God's gifts, our inheritance is given to us for the sake of others, for the sake of God, for the purposes of being given away. In other words, our inheritance is the opportunity to live our lives in such a way that people can look at us and yet see right

through us, not even noticing us really, and instead see the Christ who calls us all. Our inheritance as Christians is to live in such a way so that *others* feel enriched by Christ and blessed by Christ and loved by Christ.

And of course, as an inheritance, that opportunity to enrich other people's lives in the name of Christ isn't a gift that originated with us. We're just passing it along. And if we are only passing it along, then that means that we had to first receive it from someone else at some point in our lives. The opportunity to live for the sake of others and God did not originate with us. We simply received it, and then we give it. In other words, if we are able to give and live for the sake of others and God today, it is only because some other saint...somewhere in our lives...made the decision to give and live for our sakes too.

I like to think about that passing on of gifts from person to person in terms of being taken out for dinner versus taking somebody else out for dinner. I know that sounds kind of weird, but try to stay with me for a little while, and hopefully it will make a little more sense. You see, for much of our lives up to this point, Kristen and I and our children have been taken out to dinner a lot. Maybe some of you find yourself in a similar place in life—or maybe you remember how it was. Every time we go out to dinner with my parents, for example, or with Kristen's dad, or with some friends of ours who are about the same age as our parents, more often than not we have a conversation that usually goes something like this:

“OK, Mom and Dad, this time the meal will be our treat.”

“No, no, don't be ridiculous. We're going to pay for it.”

“No, really. We don’t mind. It’s only fair.”

“No, we’ll pay for it! Don’t say another word.”

Which, as you might guess, is usually how the conversation ends—with Kristen and myself and Elijah and Maggie being “taken out” for dinner, and the grandparents picking up the bill. Either that or we end up wrestling for it.

We really appreciate the dinner, of course, and we’re grateful for it. But we are also looking forward to returning the favor some day—not necessarily to my parents, of course, but to somebody else who needs it. It’s kind of like an observation some friends of ours made once. These friends are the same age as our parents, and one day, after they had again treated us to dinner, our friends said, “you know, Kristen and Daniel, when we were your age we were always taken out to dinner, and now it’s our turn to do the same for you. If you really want to do something about it, just return the favor to somebody else someday. Someday you will become the ones who take that younger family out to dinner.”

I love that observation so much because I think it’s kind of like the life of faith in miniature—and I think it’s the message of All Saints day in miniature. Chances are good that you and I are here today not because of our own sacrifices and strength of character and resolve of faith, but instead because somebody else made it possible for us to be here. One person told another person about Jesus, and that other person told another person, and that person told somebody else, and on and on and on through the centuries until that story of Christ has finally reached you and me today. If we know Christ today, it is because somebody else told us about him. We are in this building because somebody else made it possible. We are at the dinner

table today because somebody else chose to take us out to dinner. Somebody else picked up the bill, and today we are nourished and fed and well as a result of it.

And today is the day that we pause as a church to remember those who gave of themselves for our sake so that we are here today—to remember those saints who have made a difference in our lives. Today is the day that we give thanks to God for those who lived for God’s praise and God’s glory, as Ephesians might put it. Today we remember especially those from our church who have died during the last 12 months, as well as other saints of the faith who have made our lives better.

Who have been the saints in your life for whom we can thank God today? Who are the ones who took you out to dinner, and picked up the bill, and never asked anything in return? Who first brought you to church, maybe as a child or maybe as an adult? Who first spoke to you about God, or who first prayed for you? Who are those people who loved you and believed in you like God loves you and believes in you? Who are those people who taught you about the heart of Christ? Who are those who showed you what forgiveness is, or a second chance, or a new beginning? Maybe their photos are here today, or maybe we picture them vividly in our hearts. Maybe it was a parent, or a grandparent, or a friend. Maybe it was a teacher, or a counselor, or a Sunday school teacher, or a stranger.

Today is the day that we pause to give thanks to God for all those who have helped us to grow in relationship with Jesus Christ. Today is the day that we express our gratitude to God for all the saints of our lives who brought us to the dinner table and treated us to a meal and provided for our needs.

After the service, if we haven't done so already, or as we go up for Communion, please take a moment to look at the photos which are at the front table today [and which surround us]. These are some of the saints who have made us who we are, and today is the day that we especially express our gratitude to God for them.

And yet, more than just expressing gratitude, today is also the day—in memory of those saints—that we are invited to commit ourselves to becoming saints for somebody else and to pass that gift on yet again. Today is the day that that we commit ourselves to becoming those who take others out to dinner—those who bring others to the table, and pick up the bill, so that they can feel nourished and cared for and fed. As those who have received so much, today is the day that we also commit ourselves in their memory to pass the gift along to somebody else who needs it.

You see, there are three things that are happening this morning: this morning we give thanks to God for the saints of yesterday. This morning we commit ourselves to passing along this precious inheritance of faith to the saints of tomorrow. And finally, this morning we offer ourselves to God to help us become the saints of today. Thanks be to God. Amen.