

Dear Friends,

I wonder what your last will and testament will say if you have ever got round to writing one? I smile to myself when I hear John Wesley left two teaspoons behind and, yes, 70,000 Methodists, not your usual last testament, but he did say in almost his last breath, '*The best of all God is with us,*' a rather fitting way to bow out. His own Father's last words to John in the old rectory in Epworth were, "*The inward witness, son, the inward witness, that is the proof, the strongest proof, of Christianity.*" Some inheritance to leave behind, which in many ways is the greatest legacy left to the people called Methodist today.

In almost the last discourse of Jesus to his disciples, we have if you like his last will and testament, '*Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you*' (John 14:27), perhaps the greatest legacy left to the people professing to be Christian today. These words are often invoked at funerals but surely they are relevant for all time and place, something money can't buy.

Our age could be called the age of the tranquilizer or therapist as many people in our world today (and this is not a judgment by any means) lack inner peace. We live a world with so much instability in so many levels so it is hardly surprising. We even as professing Christian people can also feel like that at times as John Wesley himself expressed in his secret diaries (only revealed in more recent years). The toll all this takes on people's mental and emotional lives is no less serious.

No wonder John Greenleaf Whittier's well-known lines in '*Dear Lord and Father of mankind*' remain popular at funerals,

*Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered souls confess
The beauty of Thy peace.*

One thing which makes Jesus's last will and testament so relevant is it is *His peace* he offers us, an inner inheritance which no one and nothing can rob us of. This is not the peace of lethargic ease or of a safe and sheltered life. It is not the peace of an emotionless Stoic who achieves calm by damping down the fires of love and sorrow and pity in their heart. Christ's peace stands sentinel at the gateway of the soul, guarding and protecting

us from all manner of difficulty and things which seek to overwhelm us. It is also not a matter of temperament; it is a matter of accepting a gift. '*My peace I give to you.*'

Notice Jesus' language. '*My peace.*' The peace that His heart knows. On every page of the Gospel records you can feel it. Often there are continual intrusions upon His privacy, no respite from dusk to dawn, the steady drain on His spiritual resources, inconsiderate people breaking in on His hours of quiet, the burden of sharing every worry and sorrow, the misunderstandings, the cutting criticisms, the pettiness of people, the disappointments, the crushing load, and yet through it all the same serene untroubled heart. '*My peace I give to you.*' Is there anything more marvellous in the Gospels than that?

And He can give us *His peace* today, in other words adequate resources for the strain and stress for each day of our lives, '*Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,*' as the hymnist puts it. Jesus can make us more than equal to the challenges of the day. Indeed, he gives us His Holy Spirit, the supreme resource, the final adequacy, simply for the asking (Luke 11:13). To possess this is enduring peace.

The American author Joseph Conrad once wrote an essay which recorded a letter from Sir Robert Stopford, one of Horatio Nelson's men. He was commander of one of the ships with which Nelson chased to the West Indies a fleet nearly double in size. In describing his hardships, Stopford wrote, "*We are half-starved, and otherwise inconvenienced by being so long out of port. But our reward is—we are with Nelson!*"

Life may be hard for us, the world can cause us so much stress and half-starve our hopes for the present and the future, but if we can say, "*We are with Christ*", we will have our reward. We can find on earth the very peace of heaven.

Every blessing,
Rev John