

"Rooted and Grounded in Love"

Ephesians 3:14-21

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Ephesians 3:14-21

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Prayer.

Sometimes we forget to stop and smell the roses;
We lose sight of the forest because we are standing in the middle of the trees.
We live in an agenda driven world,
Where effectiveness is evaluated according to established standards,
Where chronus time is split by the second with calendars, watches, and personal computers,
Much at the expense of our sense of Aeon – eternal time.
Often times we become so laser focused
We become de-sensitized to what our larger mission really is.
If asked what we do, we quickly reply, "I've been making sausage,"
When actually, we've been preparing nutritious food to sustain our neighbors.
(We can debate the health benefits of sausage later!)

Leadership roles in the church can become this way, too.
What are you doing?
I'm painting a door; what does it look like I'm doing?
Oh, it looks like you are making our house of worship more inviting and hospitable,
reflecting the God we've come to know and experience in our lives.
What are you doing?
I'm teaching Sunday school; what does it look like I'm doing?

Oh, you're preparing the next generation of Christians to be the preachers, teachers, missionaries, evangelists, and United Methodist Women in our place long after we're dead and buried.

Pastor, don't you get paid to only work for one hour a week?

<Everyone laughs nervously>

Our Book of Discipline states,

"The servant leadership of the elder,

In both parish and extension ministries,

is expressed by leading the people of God in worship and prayer ..."¹

Yes, I work one hour a week leading worship,

But the other 167 hours each week

I'm praying for you.

Let me state that again:

I pray for you.

I think about you,

Each and every one of you.

I reflect upon the talents God has give you.

I dream about the Church's mission and ministry, and your role in it;

It's CommUNITY Dinner and Choir,

It's United Methodist Women and Basement to Attic summer sale,

It's Quilting Ministries and children and youth.

Sometimes I think of you in regards to where you sit on Sunday,

Other times it is your page in the directory,

The road you live on,

Or the family history you have shared with me down through the years.

I think about the circumstances that you're facing,

Who is sick in your family,

Who has lost a job,

Who is going into what grade in which school.

A core characteristic of any preacher worth his or her salt

Is their ability to uphold their people in prayer.

We may be immersed in the sausage making of the Leadership Council,

But, at the end of the day,

I'm praying for you.

Many times I'm too shy to let you know in so many words,

Such is my loss,

But know this as fact,

If I know your face,

You're a part of my ongoing, unrelenting, never ceasing prayers.

¹ The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2008. Par. 332, p. 240.

I did not happen upon this alone,
Neither did John Wesley, or the United Methodist Book of Discipline.
A pastor praying for their people is patterned after the Apostle Paul,
And his prayer, read this morning, for his people in Ephesus.

Paul lays out a template that is worth learning and following.
First, he prays for the company of faithful
To increase their inner spiritual strength
With power through his Spirit.
Inner spiritual strength begins with discipline:
Prayer, scripture reading, worship.
It includes loving God, neighbor, self.
It also includes a willingness to surrender the will of the self to the will of the
Father.
Then, and only then, does discipline become complete
With the gracious addition of the Spirit of Jesus.
That Spirit pushes the disciplined Christian over the top
And inner spiritual strength is grown.
This is my prayer for you,
That you might increase your inner spiritual strength,
Even as it was the prayer of the Apostle for the Church in Ephesus.

Secondly, Paul prays for the indwelling of Christ into their hearts through faith.
We are born innocent
Into a world filled with sin.
It doesn't take long
For an innocent heart to be turned toward the darkness instead of being turned
towards the light.
All that is required is for each of us to exercise our right of prevenient grace,
To let loose the grace God first gave to us
The gift of faith
That ignites with our belief
And welcomes Christ into our heart.
When Christ first fills the heart,
Every chamber and vessel is filled with his love.
That love grows.
We become not only Christ's disciples
We become Christ like in all that we think, say, and do.
This is my prayer for you,
That you might experience the indwelling of Christ into your heart through faith,
Even as it was the prayer of the Apostle for the Church in Ephesus.

Thirdly, Paul prays for the faithful in Ephesus to comprehend all the dimensions of spiritual reality.

The breadth and length and height and depth is a metaphor for the endless three dimensional plane, plus time,

Speaking to the wonder of a multi-dimensional God.²

Our God is a God of power (Ephesians 1:19),

Rich in mercy (Ephesians 2:4), who

Lavishes with grace (Ephesians 2:7 & 3:7), and is

Rich in wisdom (Ephesians 3:10).

And this is only what the Apostle Paul came up with in this letter!

Certainly, there are many more dimensions,

Even beyond what we might fathom,

That could bring additional comprehension.

In my life,

Comprehension of God's many faceted ways is still unfolding.

My prayer for you is that you might continue to be surprised and refreshed

With new comprehension to the wonder of a ever revealing God,

Even as it was the prayer of the Apostle for the Church in Ephesus.

Finally, Paul prays for the faithful in Ephesus to know the love of Christ

That surpasses knowledge,

So that they may be filled with all the fullness of God.

To know his love is greater than knowledge itself.

Hum.

This kind of puts academia on notice, don't you think?

To know the love of Christ is greater than knowledge itself.

This means to me,

Whether one has a PhD or a 4th grade education is irrelevant when it comes to knowing the love of Jesus Christ.

What allows a Mother Teresa to serve the poor all her life, yet share the stage with Pope and Nobel Laurite?

It wasn't her book learning or academic achievements,

It was her knowledge of God's love.

I know that Jesus loves me.

I know the Bible tells me so.

My prayer for you,

Regardless of your place in life,

Regardless of your circumstances,

Regardless of your prior history;

My prayer for you

² Again, I am indebted to the work of Arland J. Hultgren, Asher O. and Carrie Nasby Professor of New Testament, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN. As found at: www.workingpreacher.org

Is that you know that Jesus loves you, too.

Dearly beloved,
Though the pastor-parish relationship is somewhat like an arranged marriage,
Awkward in the beginning,
But growing all the time over these past nine years,
Know this:
Just as I lead you in worship weekly,
I pray for you daily, hourly, moment to moment.
Like the Apostle Paul,
I pray that you might have inner spiritual strength,
The indwelling of Christ in your heart,
The ability to comprehend the multiple dimensions of God's reality,
And that you might have the knowledge of the love of Christ
every moment of every day of your life.
Amen.