
¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. Ephesians 3:14-21 (NIV)

Have you ever stopped to wonder why we sometimes do what we do as ‘church’? For example, consider today’s First Reading (2 Samuel 11:1-15): “David wrote a letter to Joab and gave it to Uriah to deliver. The letter instructed Joab, “Station Uriah on the front lines where the battle is fiercest. Then pull back so that he will be killed.” Are there some times when, after hearing one of our Bible Readings, you sometimes have trouble responding to ‘This is the Word of the Lord’ with ‘Thanks be to God? Sometimes the response ‘Thanks be to God’ seems a little ‘foolish’. However, we are not saying thanks to God for what had happened (ie: “Thank You God for the murder of Uriah”). Instead, we are thanking God that people had the courage to write what had happened so that we might learn from this...

Why do we do what we do? What motivates you in life? What are the things you ‘value’, and what ‘values’ guide you in life?

Over the past few months members of our Congregation have been meeting to discuss our ‘Framework of Ministry’ (or a ‘strategic plan’ if you like). The last gathering raised a set of ‘values’ in terms of how people consider this community of faith. These were adopted by the ‘Mission and Vision Team’ and will be put to our Congregation Annual Meeting. These values are:

- * Focus is Christ
- * Engagement with God’s Word
- * Value diversity of gifts
- * Acceptance of people
- * Ministry within, and beyond, congregational boundaries
- * Celebrate God’s work in both the obvious and not so obvious places

The ‘values’ we have will shape decisions, as also should inform decisions. Of course, undergirding all this is to be God’s great love for us in Christ Jesus.

The Apostle Paul says, “I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts as you trust in Him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvellous love. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep God's love really is.”

It is important here to note that Paul's emphasis is on the initiative and activity of God. The 'love' Paul speaks of is not something we accomplish on our own if we think more positively or try to work harder, or try to be a better person. Rather, it is the great gift from God's great grace. Paul's prayer is that 'Christ would dwell in our inner being through faith' that we may have our roots deep in the soil of God's marvellous love.”

Paul's prayer is that love would begin inside of us. Our “inner being”, which Paul prays is given strength and power through the Holy Spirit so that Christ is able to “dwell in our hearts through faith”... our 'inner being' needs to be renewed by Christ.

We remember that this emphasis on our inner being is very consistent with the teachings of our Lord Jesus Himself where He insists that it is what is within us that defiles us (Mark 7:21-23): “For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these evil things come from within; they are what defile you.” And the reality of these words (of the darkness of the human heart when it comes to 'love' and the confusion of 'love' with 'lust and desire') are played out in the story of David and Bathsheba (which we begin hearing today and will explore further in the coming week).

Our problem with 'love' is not simply that the English language has become so confused, or that we may have had some bad experiences with 'love in the past. Our fundamental problem is that our hearts are not 'naturally' (that is, as we are born) inclined to seek to love others. We seek love from others, and we learn love from others. But it's not our 'nature' to 'love others.

It is difficult for a person who has never been properly loved in life to share love with others. This reality says something about the 'human nature' we all are born with. Our hearts are inclined to want to 'receive love' but not to want to 'give love' (unless, of course, we 'feel' we may 'get' something in return). But this is not true love' at all...

But the Apostle Paul prayer is: “May you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep God's love really is.”

Of course, within this prayer Paul is really referring God's great saving activity in Jesus' suffering and dying on the cross and being raised from the dead. This saving activity, says Paul, is so large that it encompasses the entire universe!

One of the early church leaders, in reflecting on the cross of Jesus, has this to say: “The upper arm of the Cross points up; the lower arm points down; and the crossing arms point out to the widest horizons. The love of Christ reaches up to include the holy angels; that it reaches down to include even the evil spirits in hell; that in its length it covers the people who are striving on the upward way; and in its breadth it covers the people who are wandering away from Christ.” In other words, no one is beyond the saving power of Jesus’ death and resurrection. You are loved in Jesus.

What is love? Love is knowing Jesus died on the cross and was raised for us. Love is knowing that Jesus’ death and resurrection make a difference in the living of our lives. Love is knowing that our sin (and our past) is ‘forgiven’. As Paul’s words of praise at the end of his prayer suggest, God’s generosity, God’s superabundant grace is able to accomplish things in us and through us far beyond our ability to ask or imagine.

You know that if a tree has deep and healthy roots then the whole tree will be healthy and produce beautiful and plentiful fruit. God’s people will be healthy ‘in the inner being’ if we have our roots in Christ’s love. God’s people will be healthy ‘in the inner being’ if our foundation for life (that is, our reference point for life and love) is Jesus’ love for us all. Just like a solid foundation keeps an entire building on solid ground, so what is given to us out of God’s fullness and placed inside our hearts will influence, instruct, and motivate our thinking and feeling, our speaking and acting—and determine the way we live life.

Do you tell people whom you care for – who surround you life – that you ‘love them’? Do you live life not for what you can ‘get out of it’ for yourself, or what you may ‘feel’ you may ‘receive’ from others, but rather to seek to give something to others irrespective of how you may ‘feel’ at the time? Do you have a sense of emptiness’ or ‘fullness’ to your life?

Paul’s prayer is that you may “experience the fullness of God” and this fullness is to have “God’s Spirit, Christ’s Spirit, in our inner being.”

To have the Spirit of God living in our hearts is to have Jesus’ words, Jesus’ attitude, and Jesus’ Spirit living inside of us. And this is not to have some ‘ideas’ about ‘love’ living inside of us, or some ‘rules for holy living’, but to have ‘love’ itself dwelling in our ‘inner being’. When Christ dwells within us by the Spirit’s power we have love itself always in our hearts.

“Do you ‘feel’ loved?” In many ways this is a wrong question... The reality is that you *are loved*, even when you might not *feel* you are loved.

Therefore, as St. Paul says, “I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources God will give you mighty inner strength through his Holy Spirit. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God’s marvellous love. May you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love really is.

If a tree has deep and healthy roots, then the whole tree will be healthy and produce beautiful and plentiful fruit. So we as God's people will be healthy and produce beautiful, plentiful fruit if our foundation is solid in Christ's love, just like a solid foundation keeping an entire building on solid ground.

Paul's prayer here is: "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."

This prayer is meant to motivate us. It is meant to impact us with a sense the wonder and value of the spiritual riches that are ours in Christ. It is meant to encourage us to let the truth of those riches sink deeply into our hearts and lives and transform us from the inside-out. It is meant to inspire us.

Do you need love for someone that you can't, in your own power, love? Do you need a joy that lifts you out of the sorrow of your circumstances? Do you need peace that calms your heart in the midst of the storms of life? Do you need patience and kindness and goodness toward others? Do you need faithfulness when your heart longs to wander, meekness when your heart is proud, self-control when you are tempted to sin?

Paul prays for us that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith. Paul's prayer reminds us that every spiritual blessing we enjoy has been a product of love. We are chosen by the Father for eternal glory "in love" (1:4). We have been raised out of death together with Christ "because of His great love with which He loved us" (2:4). Jesus loved the church and gave Himself for her (5:25). "In this is love," John writes, "not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

Let's allow this wonderful prayer of the apostle Paul to inspire and seize hold of us so that the blessing God has given us—"every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ! – is one that fills our hearts with the joy and knowledge of His love. "Amen."