

## **August 4 2024 Sermon - Rev Jo Smith**

While Ephesians it is not a systematic theology of the church, Ephesians is where Paul outlines most deeply and consistently a theology of the church.

As a letter meant to be read by more than just the believers at Ephesus, the letter to the Ephesians is an important look at how Christian belief should translate into Christian action. The first three chapters lay out spiritual ideas, the last three chapters show how these truths should be applied in the life of mature believers in the church. So, knowing that the first three chapters of Ephesians are doctrinal, the last three are practical. We will see that chapter 3 begins the transition from a Christian understanding of salvation, grace, and the power of Christ into a practical guide for Christian living. To make the transition, in this chapter, Paul refers to his own calling by God and prays for the spiritual strength of the Ephesian church, specifically that they will move from cognitive understanding to a full experience of God's Love and grace in their lives that will power their action in the world.

Rosemary told me a story this week about taking her son when he was a toddler to the shops.....remember the animals you can ride. I think they used to cost about 20 cents, probably \$2 now. Well, Rosemary very sensibly used to pop her son up on one of the rides, a horse I think, and he was quite happy having a "ride" without the power that would have been provided had Rosemary put the 20 cents in. It was a good experience but it was nothing compared to the ride it could have been. Of course, the day came when her son learned the truth and came to a full understanding of what was possible. Someone put 20 cents in and there was no going back.. He knew the truth.... About the power that was available..

Don't miss this massive, unchangeable fact: You are thoroughly loved by God.

Verse 17 tells us that as a believer in Christ "you have been rooted and firmly established in love." There are three words that need to touch our minds and souls. The first is "rooted," which pictures you as a great tree, whose roots have penetrated deep into the rich soil of God's love. To be rooted in something means you are drawing nourishment from it, your life, your food, your water, that which sustains you and causes you to flourish.

Just so, we who are His by faith in the Son of God are rooted in love, absorbing our life from the love of God. We are not dead tumbleweeds, tossed about by whatever prevailing wind comes along. Instead, we live, connected to our source of life and strength that lies beneath the surface.

Now add the second verb. You are also "firmly established in love," says Paul, and this time he uses a word from architecture. In Christ, you are like a building that has its pilings driven deep down into the bedrock below. You stand on a Rock. You are fixed to unbreakable love.

Combined, these two verbs convey the picture of endurance, of nourishment, of strength for the storms of life and solid perseverance. We are not fixed on the shifting sands of lesser foundations. We rest upon a steady love that surrounds us, making us durable and consistent. Our roots draw up the love God has for us all the time. We have been planted here by the Holy Spirit. We have been established here by that Master Builder. And because of this, we are stronger than the storms that beat upon our lives. So when Paul says we are rooted like a great oak in love and grounded like a well-founded building on love, let the truth of what that means strike you. This is perhaps the most basic spiritual fact about your life as a believer. You are loved by God. This is the air you breathe, your food and drink, the ground beneath your feet.

Brothers, sisters - God's love surrounds and saturates you all the time. There is nothing you can ever do to earn it, so there is nothing you can ever do that will stop it.

Now this fact alone will bless you profoundly even if all it is to you is a fact. But Paul can tell you from experience that a profound shift takes

place in your life when you move beyond the acknowledgement that God loves you to the feeling of your Father's joy over you. So in v. 18-20, he asks the Father to give you what it takes to make the jump from head to heart.

Paul "bows his knees before the Father in prayer, that you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth [of God's love], and to know the Messiah's love that surpasses knowledge, so you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

The content of the prayer being offered is conveyed in Ephesians 3:16-19. Essentially there are four matters for which the author prays for the sake of his readers that they may have:

- inner spiritual strength
- the indwelling of Christ in their hearts
- the ability to comprehend all the dimensions of spiritual realities
- knowledge of the love of Christ

While each of the things he prays for are good for the individual, they are particularly appropriate for the church as a whole. Reading this text in English can leave the impression that all those addressed by the pronouns "you" and "your" are singular. But in the Greek text, all of these pronouns are plurals. In other words, the writer addresses the readers as a corporate body. Thus, the four spiritual resources prayed for, and listed above, are to be found, developed, and exercised within the body of believers.

First, there is the matter of being strengthened (Ephesians 3:16). For most of us, we are strengthened and sustained by the witness of the company of believers with whom we worship. Beyond that, we are strengthened by the witness of those from the past whom we remember in the cycle of the church year — including those whose hymns we sing,

and those whom we commemorate for their preaching, teaching, and acts of courage in society, based on Christian faith.

Second, it is the indwelling of Christ in the hearts of the congregation where love is produced (Ephesians 3:17). Christ cannot be simply a concept or a memory. The risen and living Christ comes to us in Word and Sacrament, and he seeks to find hearts in which to dwell. Where he is, there is love.

Third, it is in our life together as Christians that we find ever new vistas and insights into the vast world of God (Ephesians 3:18). If we have time to listen to one another, we discover stories of faith beyond our own. In conversations with others, listening to their prayers, and observing acts of kindness and generosity, we gain understandings of God and the world that we have not known before.

Finally, Paul prays that we will know the love of Christ surpasses all other forms of our knowing (Ephesians 3:19). We celebrate that love whenever we gather for worship. God accomplishes all this “by the power at work within us,” which exceeds our expectations. For all of this, we give thanks, joining with others in glorifying God forever (Ephesians 3:20-21). This glorification is “in the church and in Christ Jesus.” That is to say, it is within the company of believers in union with Christ that God is glorified. God’s glory is our joyful goal

So, says Paul, to this God belongs “the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus for all generations, forever and ever.” Because his power is both beyond us and also at work in us, God deserves praise and glory from us, always and forever. Glorifying God—giving him praise for who he is and what he has done—is our joyful goal, now and forever.

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