

Milford Baptist Sunday 30 August, 2020
Confidence in God's power. *Ephesians 3:14-21*

Reading:

I have a confession to make!

 Quite a lot of my praying happens during the evening
 when I am awake.

 And an even more shameful confession is that I am hoping that
praying will help me go back to sleep.

Well – Paul's prayer for the Ephesians really does put me to shame!

His prayer isn't to help him go back to sleep,
 It is a passionate cry to the Father for the church.

He 'falls to his knees' to pray.

The usual posture for prayer for the Jew
 was to stand with hands outstretched – palms upward.
 To kneel expressed deep emotion or special earnestness

Paul is praying with absolute sincerity,
 Deep commitment,
 Passionate desire.

William Barclay writes:

 "His prayer for the church is so intense
that he prostrates himself before God in an agony of entreaty"

I really do have to admit that the intensity of my prayer
 is somewhat lacking.

The title I have given to his passage is:
 'Confidence in God's power'

So we need to look at verse 6.

The prayer is that God will give
from his glorious unlimited resources.

A better translation would be ‘according to his unlimited resources.’

If a millionaire gave me \$100 that would be ‘from’
If he gave me \$500000 or a blank cheque
That would be ‘according’

We need to understand that!
The strength we need to live and serve Jesus
Is according to the power of the living creative God.

I heard the story about a man who saved up to go on a cruise.
Every last cent he saved was finally spent on a 10 day cruise.

So off he went to the port and boarded the ship.

He took with him one small suitcase of clothes
and a large suitcase filled with cheese crackers.

That was all he could afford to eat during the cruise
because he had spent all his money on the fare.

On the last day the captain came across him on the deck, and said:

“You know – I have not seen you in the dining room all cruise.”

The man replied:

“ I couldn’t afford to pay for any food.
All my money was spent on the cruise itself.”

To which, of course, the captain replied:

“Sir, your fare covered all the meals.
You have been eating cheese cracker biscuits
when you could have been eating sumptuously of the finest cuisine.”

That is so often me.

I suspect it is so often some of you.

The resources of God are available to us,
and yet we live as though we had to do it on our own.

You know there are two great differences
between Christianity and any other religion.

One is that God has come to us.
He came in Jesus and became a man.
No other religion has the incarnation
God became human.

The second great difference is that God comes to us.
It is not all about us struggling to meet standards,
to fulfil obligations,
to carry out rituals,
to earn favour with a higher being

It is all about opening ourselves up to the Holy Spirit;
the God who comes to us,
lives in us,
transforms us from within,
equips us with gifts to serve him,
empowers us to change lives, and to change society.

So Paul prays for them to be strong in their inner being.
He doesn't pray for their physical needs,
certainly not for their material needs;
all his prayers are for the needs of the inner person.

That is: a persons' mind, their conscience, and their will.
And the prayer, of course,
it is that they will have strength through the Holy Spirit.

The New Testament always teaches, or assumes,
that strength for life and service comes from
the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

When we read the story of the early church in Acts
we see the importance of the Holy Spirit.
There are 59 references to the Holy Spirit in Acts.

Somone has said that:

“If God took the Holy Spirit out of this world
most of what Christians are doing would go right on,
and nobody would know the difference.”

I hope that is an exaggeration,
but we need to think about
how true is it of you and of Milford church?

Then he goes on to use three illustrations.
That Christ may dwell in your hearts,
That you may be rooted in love,
That you will be established, or grounded in love.

Prays that: “Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts.”

It literally means that Christ will settle down and feel at home.

In the old hymn “Abide with me”

There is a verse that is not included in the Baptist hymn book.

Not a brief glance, I beg, not a passing word,
But as you lived with your disciples, Lord,
Familiar, close, patient, free,
Come, not to stay a while, but to abide with me.”

That is the desire of Jesus.

Not to come and stay with us, not even as a special guest,
But to settle down, and live permanently and comfortably
In our lives.

Then there is the image of roots
going down deep into the soil of God’s love .

From time to time we see pictures of trees
that have been uprooted by high winds.
If the roots are not deep enough,
there is always the danger of unsteadiness or destruction.
Our roots must go deep.

Likewise, foundations must be deep.

A Pastor was growing impatient at the length of time
it was taking to take soil tests,
and lay foundations for a new church.
When he complained, the project manager replied:
"Pastor, the most important part of this building is the foundation.
If you don't go deep, you can't go high."

If you want to have a story of faith that will cope with questioning,
If you want to work for the Kingdom in a way that is effective,
then your foundation must be on the bedrock of God's love.

Isn't it interesting that the roots go down into God's love.
The foundation is the love of God.
Not his holiness, or his wisdom, or his creativity

He wants his readers to understand how wide and long,
how high and deep, is the love of Christ.

The greek word for 'understand'
does not mean mental understanding.
It means 'taking hold of for yourself,
Applying it to your own life.
Basing your own understanding of yourself
On the fact of God's incredible love.

We know and understand the love that comes
as a reward for being good,
for being faithful, for being kind,
for giving gifts, and for acting with appropriate behaviour.
But this is not the love we can never fully understand.

Recently someone gave me an article,
Admittedly, written 50 years ago,
That suggests that God only loves his children
only loves Christians,
But that he hates those who are not his children.
I am sure the writer wants us to take sin seriously,
But I cannot possibly line that view up with the God I know.

His is a love that flows freely,
without consideration of reward or plan for recompense.
This is a love that is not inherent to human nature.
We are more inclined to return love for love and enmity for enmity.

But the teaching of Jesus is that we are to be like Him,
We are to love like him.

Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote,
"We must love them both:
those whose opinions we share
and those whose opinions we reject.
For both have labored in the search for truth,
and helped us in the finding of it."

The ancient philosopher Cicero wrote:
"There is no more certain sign of arrogance,
narrow-mindedness, and ignorance
than to stand apart from those who think differently from us."

Too often, we allow differences to grow walls among us.
How helpful it would be for us to remember
that the one we feel bitter toward,
the one who holds a different opinion,
the one who has different values, the one who dresses oddly
...all these are individuals whom Christ loves and for whom he died.

Remember, we have an incredible resource
for becoming great lovers.

Listen to Paul's prayer in another translation:

"I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,
may have power ... to grasp how wide and long and high and deep
is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge
— that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

Filled with the fullness of God!

Just think how that could change our behaviour toward others.
No longer would we reflect our human frailty,
our shallow hurts and bitterness,
our resentments at the unfairness of life which we all experience.

Instead, we could be lovers like Jesus
Showing unconditional love and acceptance and kindness.

One story that reflects this love is about little Willie,
the smallest child of a sharecropping family in the 1940s.
They had just enough money to survive.

One time through the mother's careful saving,
they had an extra dollar.
She sent it into the Sears Roebuck catalog
for their first luxury, a small mirror.

When it arrived, each family member looked at it.
When it got to Willie he gasped in horror.
His face was full of scars.
As an infant he had been bitten by a dog.
As a toddler he had been kicked in the head by a horse.

He looked at his mother:

"Mama, did you know I looked like this all along?"

"Yes, Willie, I knew."

"And you still loved me?"

"Yes, of course I loved you, Willie, and I do love you,
and I will always love you, because you are mine.
You are mine!"

There are times when I look at the scars of my sinfulness
and I have to ask the Lord:

"Can you love me the way I am?
Even though I neglect you and come to you only when it suits me?"

But then, in my heart, I hear him whisper,

"Yes, I love you.
I love you because you are mine."

"To be filled with the fullness of life and power
that comes from God."

Frank Laubach,

A missionary to the Phillipines in the early 1900's
hit rock bottom one night,

Looking at his life's work it seemed as if it all amounted to nothing.

He and his wife had lost three children to malaria.

Now, in his mid-40's he was sick and in quarantine,
Having to live apart from his wife and one remaining child.
He was completely alone.

That's when he met God.

Imagine how shocking this must have been.

He had been a Christian most of his life
and had given his life to taking the gospel
to a foreign people.

And in his moment of deepest despair

he finally realized that he could live
in intimate communion with God
through the Holy Spirit.

In quarantine he found the union he had longed for all of his life.

He began to keep a journal and wrote the following words
sitting alone on a mountain.

“Clearly my job here is not to go to the town plaza
and convince people to change their religious beliefs
or to win a theological debate.

My job is to live wrapped in God,
trembling with His thoughts,
burning with His passion.

Frank Laubach’s life stands as a wonderful testimony
to the power of God to empower
the life of one willing person.

He decided that his one passion
would be to walk in step with the Spirit
every moment of every day.
He would walk with God and leave the results to him.
So what did God do through this man?

Laubach developed a literacy education program
known as “each one teach one”
and became the leader
of a worldwide literacy movement.

As a result of his teaching methods more than 60 million people
speaking 200 different languages and dialects
learned to read in their own native language.

This humble broken man
became an advisor to Presidents and national leaders.

He became so influential that he is the only Christian Missionary
to be honoured by having his face
on an American postage stamp.

And we know how that happened.

God empowered him to do what he did - through the Holy Spirit.

And you know,
The same power from the same Holy Spirit
Is available to us today.

It's all about opening ourselves up to the Holy Spirit.

The God who comes to us,
lives in us,
transforms us from within,
equips us with gifts to serve him,
empowers us to change lives
and to change society.

Friends, I want more of that power.

I want to be more successful in defeating the sin in my life.
I want to be more like Jesus in my attitudes and behaviour,
I want to be more effective in making a difference.

Is that what you want too?

Can you and I say, as Frank Lauback said,
My job is to live wrapped in God,
Trembling with his thoughts,
Burning with his passion.

Let us pray together.

