

March 22, 2020

Read Ephesians 3:1-21

“that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength 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, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” Eph. 3:16-19

I have always found Paul’s prayers to be both encouraging and challenging. Encouraging because they cut to the heart of what we truly need, challenging because he aims so much higher than we often do. As Paul brings the theological portion of his letter to the Ephesians to a close, he prays for them before calling them to “live a life worthy of the calling” they have received.

So what is Paul’s prayer?

That God, by the Holy Spirit, strengthens us with power to comprehend and experience the love of Christ. At first glance, that might seem to be an unremarkable prayer. But it is literally spiritual dynamite!

Literally because Paul is praying for *power*, or in Greek, *dunamis* – the root for dynamite. Paul is praying for the dynamic power of God, the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead, to be at work in our inner beings by the presence of the Holy Spirit and Jesus Himself.

To what purpose? So that we may be “rooted and grounded” in love, comprehend the greatness of God’s love with our minds, and experience (know) the love of Christ that is beyond measure.

The purpose is that we be consumed by and live out of the love of God for us in Christ Jesus our Lord. Paul is praying for God’s power to fill us with His perfect love! We are to be rooted and grounded, established, in His love. His love for us is to be our foundation. We are meant to find our identity in being His beloved. We are to live out of and in response to this great love.

We are to grow in our comprehension, our cognitive knowledge of His love. We are to meditate on His love. We are to build our lives upon the incontrovertible fact that God loves us and sent His Son to not only tell us that good news, but to show it with His life and His saving death. We need God’s power at work within us to comprehend this unfathomably great love.

We are to experience the life of Love Himself. Knowing that God loves us with our minds is precious knowledge, but experiencing the pure and unbounded love of God Himself forever changes us, motivates us, and sets our lives on fire for Him.

Do you know, in every sense of the word, that God loves you like this? Are you willing to let Him?

Fr. Karl Dietze
Trinity Anglican Church

March 23, 2020

Read Ephesians 3

“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think” (Ep 3:20)

I saw a post yesterday online from a noted Christian author. It said, “I never planned on giving up so much for Lent.” If there was ever a time that we could use some light heartedness it’s now as a seeming tidal wave of fear and anxiety washes over the world. It is also at times like these that the truths of our faith can come alive in liberating ways that allow us to experience God’s abundant love.

Paul writes our passage today while imprisoned in Rome with his fate seemingly hanging in the balance. And by all accounts, Caesar was the one holding the scales. However, as we listen to his words we see that he views his circumstances in a completely different way. In twenty-one verses Paul only alludes to his predicament twice, and even then it is in the light of serving a larger purpose of being able to help others (1,13). Conversely, he mentions God, Christ, the Spirit, and their attributes over twenty times. This is over a 10:1 ratio.

Let us learn from the Apostle this simple truth: where our focus rests will determine our experience of reality. Do we rejoice with Paul while we’re self-quarantined or do we grumble with discontent? Do we revel in God’s abundant love or are we shaking with anxiety and fear? It is well known that we might actually be powerless over the first thoughts that sometime pop into our heads. However, it is also true that we are not helpless to shape the proceeding thoughts.

Surely, Paul had thoughts about the possibility that his physical life might end. But he didn’t dwell on them, rather he turned to the abundance of God’s love present with him. During times like now, when great concern and caution are called for, it would be foolish to assume we would be free of anxiety and fear. Yet, whether we will live in God’s liberating wisdom and peace, or be tempted to panic and even hysteria, will be determined on how we chose to respond to those first thoughts. Paul gives us a good ratio to aim for.

Paul is living into the good news that Jesus’ death on the cross and rising from the grave delivered the death blow to evil. Though evil is still present, it no longer holds the keys to death. The resurrection began rolling back the curse so that God’s blessing and power of love could bring liberation now. Because of these facts, Paul knew his fate was secure in Jesus and that Caesar had no real power over him. And these same facts declare to us the truth that COVID19 has no real power over us for our fate is secure in God’s abundant love.

Take time today to meditate on Paul’s prayer in v14-21 and let it change your focus for the day.

Father Mark Hall
All Saints Anglican Church

March 24, 2020

Read Exodus 31

“See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, 3 and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, 4 to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, 5 in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. 6 And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you.” (Exodus 31:2-6)

There was once a young carpenter, step-son of a carpenter, who labored for many years in obscurity. No one knew who he was and no one recognized him for his work, no matter how splendid or ordinary it may have been. But one day, that carpenter became known to the whole world, because of the magnificent work that he did with just three nails and two beams...

Labor in the ordinary and mundane can oftentimes feel meaningless. Whether it's yet another monthly report at the office or shipment of supplies to a local grocery store. We often take these things for granted and look past the labor and efforts that went into providing a good, service, or even a piece of art. Only the most extraordinary works draw our attention and often the flashier they are the better.

Exodus 31 is likely one of those chapters that when you've come to it in the lectionary, or a reading plan, that you simply turn your brain off and glaze over it. Following a long shopping list of items to craft and laws to uphold, we just want to turn to the next chapter about the golden calf. You know, the interesting stuff. And that's exactly what the people were thinking when Moses was receiving this laundry list, up on the mountain for forty long days. But I think that if we stop to take a look at what this says, we'll find something extraordinary and beautiful that God is doing within our own lives.

The Lord tells Moses that He has called specific craftsmen by name to build the articles of worship and the tabernacle itself. Nothing surprising there, he also called the priests by name to minister in the temple, why not the builders as well? But the thing that has always grabbed my attention in this passage is that the Lord says he has *“filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship”* (Ex. 31:3). It is not enough simply for God to give them the blueprints, but He divinely inspires their work and gives them the ability to complete their work. Ordinary tasks for an extraordinary purpose. And that is what we are called to in all that we do: to carry out ordinary tasks with an extraordinary purpose, offering all that we are and do as worship to the Lord. May God so inspire all the things that we do that our work would be pleasing and acceptable in His sight, as we labor in the temple of our bodies.

Deacon Steve Braun
Trinity Anglican Church

March 25, 2020

The Annunciation of Our Lord Jesus Christ to the Virgin Mary.

Read Ephesians 5:1-17

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of the light” (Ephesians 5:8 New International Version).

How are we to live as children of light? Lent is a blessed time to ponder the admonitions of St. Paul to the faithful in Ephesus, for they as we are surrounded by a world in darkness. Darkness not only in the culture, but for us at this particular time, darkness that comes from an unexpected event which is changing our lives for the present. How could we imagine that we would see empty grocery store shelves, thousands of businesses closed and perhaps millions out of work for a time.

“Be imitators of God, therefore, so dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:1-2 NIV).

Though there are some stories of selfish behavior at this time, I am so taken by the many acts of kindness occurring, neighbors helping each other and the businesses that are stepping up to help the vulnerable among us. I once heard a priest say that even those in our country who are not followers of Christ benefit from living in a nation founded upon the principles of Christianity. Mercy, selflessness, charity and truth are all given to us in grace from Jesus and those around us are blessed as well when we share our love for Jesus with them and become His hands in a turbulent world.

On this feast day of the Annunciation we will remember Gabriel’s words to Mary *“for nothing is impossible with God (Luke 1:37 NIV)* and Mary’s words to Gabriel *“I am the Lord’s servant, may it be to me as you have said” (Luke 1:38 NIV)*. In this time of darkness let us be the light for the world by trusting in the mighty power of God to accomplish all things, and by serving all whom the Lord puts in our path.

*“If you make the Most High your dwelling-
even the Lord, who is my refuge-
then no harm will befall you,
no disaster will come near your tent.
For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.*

Deacon Leslie Arbegast
Ascension Anglican Church

March 26, 2020

Read Ephesians 5:18-end

“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” Ephesians 5:18-20

A few decades ago, a great debate was taking place, and still takes place to this day. “What kind of music should we sing and play in the church?” Should we sing only hymns or choruses; or should we blend the two together? I found myself in the midst of that debate, and once I made up my mind that I was right, I wouldn’t give an inch. *Notice I’m not telling you what side of the debate I came to agree with.* And the reason I am not telling you, is because this passage completely destroys all sides of the debate.

The point of this passage is not to instruct us toward a particular style of worship music, but to direct us to the purpose of the music. The purpose is to make melody to the Lord and draw us to a place of thanksgiving.

Notice that Paul writes, “addressing one another.” While we are quite able and commanded to worship God in our private lives, Paul emphasizes the importance of corporate worship. Music in worship can be seen pictured in the shape of a cross. The horizontal beam is represented by songs of fellowship and love for others. While the vertical beam is represented by songs which are directed to God himself. Worship can also be seen in the pattern of the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments directs us how to live our lives in relationship to God and with other believers. Our worship music expresses our love for God and for his people.

The Liturgy we practice each Sunday is a wonderful model of worship in that it interweaves both direct praise to God and moments of fellowship. That interconnectedness of praise and fellowship are seen throughout in the singing, the sharing of scripture, the homily, the Prayers of the People, the corporate confession of sin, the celebration of the Eucharist, the closing blessing, and the call to “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.” It is a liturgy directed towards God and at the same time an act of fellowship as we worship and celebrate together.

Music that is worthy for worship focuses, our attention, ultimately, toward God, even songs of fellowship because in showing our love for each other, we show our love for the one who created us. It is music that tells us something about God and who he is. It is music that can be quite emotional, but it is emotion based on the truth of God.

As we travel through this Lenten journey, let us travel it together. Addressing one another with Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, making melody in our hearts to the Lord.

Deacon Ron Christolear
Trinity Anglican Church

March 27, 2020

Read Matthew 27:1-26

“Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind” (Mt 27:3)

Judas is one of the most enigmatic figures in all of Scripture. How could he spend day in and day out with Jesus for three years, observing his many miracles, and still betray him? It's hard for us to grasp. There are various theories as to what might have motivated Judas, and not all of them bad. However, we will never truly know what motivated him this side of Christ's return.

In the last few days we've also seen behavior that we may find hard to grasp as a result of the pandemic. We all respond to anxious times differently, and we all have differing motivations that underly our responses. Now is not the time for us to get caught up in the cycle of trying to figure out or judge others motives. Rather now is an opportune time to continue to accept the invitation to a holy Lent through self-examination and repentance.

In our passage Judas gives us both a great and an awful illustration of repentance. What he gets right is that he changed his mind about his choice to betray Jesus and then he tried to make it right by returning the money. All true repentance begins with the conviction that a thought, word, or deed has betrayed Jesus. We change our mind, and then we change our direction. Judas changed his mind, but he never changed his direction. He started well, and ended tragically.

Judas felt bad about what he had done. He tried to make it right in his own strength by returning the money. Yet he never changed his direction back towards God. Instead his guilt and sense of condemnation over what he had done led him to commit suicide. How different we see Peter's response on Easter morning as he ran to the empty tomb (Lk.24:12). Instead of carrying his guilt alone Peter returned to the community and then ran to Jesus the first chance he had.

For repentance to be fruitful our faith must be engaged. When we come to our senses and realize we betrayed Jesus by trying to live apart from him in sinful thoughts, words, and deeds we are then to turn around and run to him. Trusting that he already died for our sins, and that he longs to set us free through his gracious forgiveness. This is why the last part of repentance is always to rejoice. We're to rejoice by faith, that we are forgiven and restored to a loving relationship.

When we fail to follow a lifestyle of repentant faith through the pattern of recognize, return, and rejoice we run the risk of being like Judas. Sure we probably won't hang our selves, but if we're prone to self-condemnation, know that it is like holding the devil's hand and looking at Jesus on the cross and saying, "That's not enough for my sin." This is in essence spiritual suicide.

Pray the Holy Spirit would reveal the ways you betray Jesus and then return and rejoice in him.

Father Mark Hall

All Saints Anglican Church

March 28, 2020

Read Psalm 130

But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared. (Psalm 130:4)

As we and the world are overwhelmed by this virus pandemic, we need to look at the pandemic of sin which has spread throughout all of humanity since the fall. There is now no cure for this physical virus and in thousands of years mankind has tried to find ways to heal the pain of selfishness has consumed with our addictive self-gratification. The control of our lust of money and power or our gratification of our fleshly desires didn't have a cure. The only way to find a cure is to allow God to show us the fallacy of our selfish ways and give us a way to change the direction from our selfish ways and repent. After doing this we recognize who God really is and are then willing to recognize that He is Lord and have an awesome holy fear of God.

The kind of relationship with God which comes as a result fearing the Lord which requires more than just understanding that He exists. [Isaiah 8:13](#) states, ***"The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread,"*** We will be disposed to fear the Lord if we understand that He has power to judge all creation. We read in [Psalm 96:10](#), ***"Say among the nations, 'The Lord reigns.' The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved for He will judge the peoples with equity."*** One day we will stand before God and be disposed to fear the Lord and we realize that He is truly holy. That He is set apart from all creation in purity and perfection. [Revelation 15:4](#) reminds us of this. ***"Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy."***

Remember the uncertainty attached to learning to ride a bicycle or baking bread. In a similar way, fearing the Lord and repenting are not an activities which come naturally to us. In learning anything new we feel awkward, uncomfortable and very unskilled. Many things in life need to be learned and the fear of the Lord is one of them. How will we learn to live in the fear of the Lord which will accomplish the goals desired by God for all of us.

Who is there who loves life? We always admire people who enjoy life. We try to enjoy life and the more we enjoy it the happier we are. Do you love life? Do you desire many good days? The answer is yes, of course. The implication is to fulfill these desires, we need to live in the fear of the Lord. It is the person who fears the Lord will have a good life with many good days. This makes fear of the Lord is highly desirable and motivational because fearing Him will become the highest priority in our lives.

Then what are the things which I need to do in order to learn how live in the fear of the Lord? The first one is to trust and the second is to obey Him even in the darkest places. Why should we trust and obey when He tells us that He loves us? There are three indicators of God's love for us; He promises our redemption, He uses our trials to teach us how to live better, healthier lives and promises to be present in all of these dark places. Knowing all this, we must seek to live in the fear the Lord, repent and then receive His abundant forgiveness.

Deacon Gregory Statezni
Trinity Anglican