

Camille Cook Howe  
Confirmation Sunday  
February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Ephesians 3:14-21  
Washington, D.C.  
Remind me again

*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.*

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

When I was a child, we said four prayers every night at bedtime. The Lord's Prayer. The Hail Mary (because we were Catholic). A family prayer with all of our names listed. And a final prayer for the night. That prayer went like this:

*Now I lay me down to sleep,  
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.  
If I die before I wake,  
I pray the Lord my soul to take.*

Now as a kid, I found this prayer to be absolutely terrifying. First of all, facing your mortality is never fun but as a kid introducing the concept that you might go to sleep and never wake up, just die in your sleep, this was not helpful. The second piece of it that made a peaceful slumber difficult was introducing the possibility that if I did DIE in the night that the Lord might just decide to not take my soul. Maybe on that day, I had been too naughty and so my soul was out of luck. This was existential!

Ponder the fact that the Creator of the Universe may leave your soul to float unclaimed in the vast emptiness of the afterworld. Needless to say, I do NOT say this prayer with my children at night.

This prayer is upsetting and also is bad theology. There are better things to hear at bedtime. Our reading today is a different prayer which was written by Paul to his friends in the church in Ephesus. Maybe it is a bit wordy for a kid's bedtime prayer but ultimately this is good theology. Paul is writing a long letter to the church and it begins by telling them about the works of God in the world. The second half to the book is the set of instructions for the readers for how they are supposed to respond to God's work in the world. They are told how to 'live lives worthy of the callings to which they have been given.' Our passage today is a hinge prayer in the middle of the letter. The prayer is the intersection of what God has done and what they are called to do.

The letter is first theology and then teachings but in the middle Paul pauses for a prayer. It is his prayer for the church, it is his prayer for his friends, and it is a great prayer for us today.

Paul says, *I pray that, according to the riches of God's glory, God 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.*

What Paul wants them to know is the boundless love of God – boundless in the breadth and length and height and depth of God's grace and love in Jesus Christ. Paul prays that they will experience the love of God in heart and mind and soul. He wants this knowledge to be lodged within them. Yes, Paul wants them to have good theology. Yes, Paul wants them to live out their faith in actions. But maybe more importantly Paul wants them to know the boundless love God has for each one of them.

So how about this revision of the childhood prayer?

*Now I lay me down to sleep,  
I know the Lord my soul will keep.  
When I wake to a new day,  
I trust God's love will guide by way.*

It is at least less terrifying...and a daily reminder of what Paul wanted to pray for his friends. Today we have a significant milestone in the lives of our confirmation class. They have wrestled with theological concepts, they have studied the bible and the creeds, and they have pondered their own lives of faith. This is all wonderful and we want them to do this and continue this work but what is maybe even more important is that each one of these teenagers knows, in their hearts, the boundless love of God for each of them. Beyond the questions they will be asked as they join the church today, I just want to ask each of them, "Do you know God loves you?" "Do you really know that?" You need to know that.

Kant said there are limits to what we can know by reason. But reason is not the only way to know things. You can also know things in your heart. The heart has its own knowledge. Our hearts need to know that the Creator of the Universe loves us and will not leave us alone. Paul talks of this as, "the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge."

"Do you know God loves you?" We need to be reminded of this when we are tiny and being rocked to sleep at night. We need to be reminded of this as we go off to school all by ourselves for the first time. We need to be reminded of this as teenagers facing pressures and temptations out in the world. We need to be reminded of this when we go and get jobs and create homes and find people to love. We need to be reminded of this when we experience depression or illness or burnout or heartbreak. We need to know this when our days are simple and sweet and when our days are messy and complicated. We need to know, not with our logic or with our capable minds,

but in the bottom of our hearts, that God's love for us is boundless. I give you permission to call me up and just say those three little words..."remind me again"...and I will tell you about the boundless love of God for you.

When my kids get out of the car to go to school, I say to them, "God be with you." Not because I'm commanding God to go to school with them but because I am reminding my kids that no matter what happens, God is in fact with them. Now you might think because they are pastors' kids when I say, "God be with you" they politely reply, "and also with you". But in fact, they do not, they just slam the car door. But it is a daily deposit into their minds and hearts that nothing they will face, will they face alone – God is in fact with them. I want our confirmation kids to know this today, deep in their hearts, and to carry it with them, everywhere they go. I want that to be a very firm foundation for their lives, and for the rest of us too.

It has happened to me quite a few times over the years, with people at the end of their lives, I am praying over their hospital or hospice beds, and I wonder if they can hear me or know what I am saying. Then I get to the Lord's Prayer, and they start saying it with me. They say it because it is lodged deep within them, they say it because it is knowledge which surpasses understanding, they say it because they said it again and again and again while they lived and moved and carried out their days.

Faith is believing, in our hearts, in things which are beyond understanding - and the knowledge of our hearts will carry us through. That was Paul's prayer for the church in Ephesus and it is my prayer for the church in Georgetown. I pray that you know that God's love for you is boundless. But just let me know if you ever want me to remind you again!

Amen.