

Unsurpassed Love for Unimagined Blessing!
Ephesians 3:12-21
July 18, 2010
Michael Carey

Thank you for your prayers; my sinus surgery was much less painful than I feared. The horrific experiences that some of you had didn't materialize for me—though I really appreciate you telling me those stories! However, I enjoyed the ultimate “staycation”: sentenced to spend five days in a lazy boy chair with a TV remote control, my laptop, and my smart phone!

My experience with surgery was not disappointing. But I know many people who have been disappointed with the outcome of surgery. I know many people who are disappointed by their continued unemployment or lingering financial uncertainty. All of us are disappointed when we slip back into sin. We are disappointed by the strains in our marriages and the heartaches in our families. Disappointment is common to all.

Paul wrote today's text so that disappointment doesn't ossify into discouragement. Please turn to Ephesians 3; we're actually going to pick up the text with the last part of what Hoyt read last Sunday. After marveling over the wonderful mystery of the Gospel, in verse 10, that *through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known*, in verse 12 the apostle wrote:

In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

Paul wants us to know that we can and should be disappointed, but we should never be discouraged. **Disappointed—yes! Discouraged—no!** I'm sure he would understand why you would be discouraged. But he wants you to know—you don't have to live there! By God's grace, even in the valley you can see your bright future. He himself suffered terribly for faithfulness to Christ; yet came to see these disappointments as the church's glory.

Hundreds of years ago, a Christian wrote of his own discovery; he called it “the valley of vision”:

Lord, in the daytime, stars can be seen from the deepest wells, the deeper the wells the brighter thy stars shine; let me find thy light in my darkness, thy life in my death, thy joy in my sorrow, thy grace in my sin, thy riches in my poverty, thy glory in my valley.
 (from The Valley of Vision, Puritan prayers collected by Arthur Bennet)

We have already seen bright stars as Paul recalled how God *has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ* (1:3). As we move into verse 14, Paul writes with a personal touch, as a spiritual shepherd. This is his prayer for the Ephesians; it is also my prayer for you. This is Hoyt, Jonathan, and Laura's prayer—the prayer of anyone who has the privilege of nurturing your growth:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, 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.

You've heard of "shepherd's pie"; this is "shepherd's prayer." In a nutshell, your spiritual shepherd yearns that the glorious riches of God's grace would be applied for your benefit, first, as the **Father's Spirit strengthens you with power**. In verse 16 Paul wrote *I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being*. In 1:19 Paul wrote that the same power that resurrected the dead body of Jesus would give you life. Until you are resurrected, this life is for the practice of resurrection! While disappointed in setbacks you are not discouraged; you feel a power within you from beyond you.

Your shepherd prays that **your faith participate with the indwelling Christ**; verse 17 says *that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith*. Though you may have welcomed Jesus into your life, perhaps you've not yet welcomed his power, trusted him with what he wants to do with you. Jesus is a gracious guest in your life...he will not force you to arrange your life his way. But when you trust him, when you are willing to have to faith to manage your money, your sexuality, and your power as his servant—you discover his powerful presence! Practicing resurrection—is the gradual process of becoming more like Christ by participating in the indwelling Christ's continuous makeover. The second half of Ephesians takes one makeover issue at a time. In two weeks we're going to consider what it means to have "a new self with a new attitude." The Sunday after that Paul will show us how to "deal with our anger."

Your shepherd also prays that **your rootedness in church awakens you to God's abundant love**. The Ephesians were rooted in their community. They were committed to relationships with other Christ-followers. As Paul wrote in verse 17, *I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints*. It's when we are making this spiritual journey together that we begin *to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know that this love surpasses knowledge*. By being connected to people like these we get to see miracles of resurrection in ordinary peoples' lives.

Many of you have been disappointed with the church, here or elsewhere. There may be times the Holy Spirit leads people to make a fresh start in new congregation, but we never ever want to let ourselves give up on Christ's church, for the church is God's main strategy to change us and bless us. If we stay un-rooted, we stay immature. Next week I'm going talk about how we "get better together." I'm absolutely convinced that Christian community is the main way we discover *how wide...how long...how high...and how deep is the love of Christ!*

Your shepherd is convinced that if you can see the abundance of God's love, then you will relax and enjoy your transformation. Eugene Peterson writes about a married couple with two teenage sons who adopted a five year old from Haiti. From Port-au-Prince they took Addie to her new home in Arizona, and sat down for their first supper together. They had pork chops and mashed potatoes on the table. After the first serving, the two teenage boys kept refilling their plates. Soon the pork chops and potatoes were gone. But the parents noticed that Addie had become very quiet and visibly agitated.

Her new mom figured out what was wrong. Addie had grown up hungry; when the food was gone from the table she likely feared that it would be a day or more before she ate. So she took Addie by the hand and led her to the bread drawer, to see the loaves that were left. She opened the refrigerator and pointed to the milk, the orange juice, the eggs and bacon, the jars of jelly and peanut

butter. She took her to the pantry lifted Addie up and had her grasp the cans of soups and the bags of beans. By taking the time to show her the abundance of food, she convinced Addie that she would never go hungry again.

Paul hasn't just told us that we won't be weak; in Ephesians he showed an abundance of power in order that we trust that there isn't going to be a shortage of resurrection power if we will but belong and believe! The outcome is that **God's fullness overflow you**. Verse 19 says *that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God*. When God fills you with His grace, you become a fountain of grace for others. Then Paul brings the first half of Ephesians to its climatic close:

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, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Friends, whatever disappointment you face, whatever hardships lie ahead...don't ever underestimate what God can do to bring your darkness into light, to forge your weakness to strength, to fashion your suffering into victory! So practice resurrection till the day you are resurrected! *He is able to do immeasurably more than all you ask...or even imagine!* So give Him the glory, which means "recognize his significance." Give Jesus the glory for what he does in each and every generation! Give his church the glory due the church as the body of Christ.

If what I'm saying makes any sense in your mind or ignites the hopes of your heart, decide today that you will practice resurrection, and let us know how we as shepherds can support your growth.