

July 26 , 2015

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

From St Paul's letter to the Ephesians

" 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".

In this focused and powerful letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul is praying to God for the mission that Paul has taken on his own shoulders:

To bring Salvation, and a new identity of Christ to the whole world.

Ephesus was an ancient city in an area that is now modern day Turkey The city was famed for the Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Artemis was the Hellenic God of wild animals and the hunt.

As political and military powers ebbed and flowed as they have throughout human history, the city was destroyed, then rebuilt by Goths, then Romans.. Following an order from a later Roman Emperor, what remained of the Pagan temple was destroyed in 400 AD by a mob led by a Christian named St. John Chrysostom. Those familiar with Episcopal churches in downtown Chicago may be familiar with that name

Ephesus was one of the seven churches of Asia that are cited in the Book of Revelation and The Gospel of John may have been written there. Ephesus was a vitally important city in the growth of the church in Asia Minor., the ruins of the city are a favorite tourist destination to this day.

In his many Epistles, but particularly in Ephesians, when I hear Paul praying that God give the readers strength, that he does not wish them to rely on their own strength but God's strength....I personally have always felt stronger, more able to face the issues and troubles of life in this the world.

Paul has wrote extensively explaining that man is in no way good enough alone but rather needs God's grace. Paul does not tell the people to "be stronger" but calls on God to give them strength.

For many of us, this is basic Christianity. Children speak of Christ in their heart -- to me that means rooted in our self.

In July 2014, just twelve months ago, there were three men living together in a large, comfortable house in La Grange, Illinois, Louis and Bobbie had been partners for more than fifty five years; both were approaching 90 years of age.

The third gentleman, Michael, was younger..... just 64 years old and he was the caregiver. Karen and I had been friends with each of these men for more than 30 years.

On August 25, 2014, Michael the caregiver one of my dearest friends died of a lung condition, he died on his 65th birthday. Michael was one of the lay pillars of strength at Emmanuel Episcopal Church in La Grange. Michael looked after everyone except himself and Karen and I had spent many hours attempting to persuade Mike to put his affairs in order. He never did; we thus spent many hours after his death working particularly with his sisters Kerry and Toni resolve his personal financial and property situation. With Kerry, I was the last person to see Michael and he called on God to give him strength to turn the page and start a new life. Michael was deeply in love with Jesus Christ and God answered his prayer..

It is tempting to believe that "God helps those who help themselves" We quote this all the time, but we forget that this is not the doctrine of the gospel. In truth, we seek God's help because we cannot help ourselves. God helps, because God is able to help.

We use a Latin word, Omnipotent, to describe God's power. Rene Descartes described this power somewhat better than the word itself by suggesting that a person imagine the greatest most powerful being they could think of. The true omnipotent God has power even greater than what can be imagined. Paul addresses God using the same metaphor later described by Descartes. God is more than we can ask for, or imagine.

I will speculate that this metaphor is strongly related to all suggestions that our lives are connected with Christ. Whether conflict, or success, or failings, our lives have been connected with Christ... whether Christ "dwells in our hearts" because he is always in our thoughts, and we pray just as we breathe", or if this is something deeper and more mystical... Paul's prayer is that we are tied more and more closely with Christ.

In November 2014, Louis suddenly became sick and on December 7th 2014 he died of a highly aggressive cancer. Louis had been an extremely wealthy man and left a large Estate. Bobbie, was the named Trustee, but being close to 90 years old and of uncertain health, Bobbie requested I assume the role of Trustee and Bobbie's Power of Attorney. Seven months later, I am still working on the complexities of the Estate.

Louis also deeply loved Jesus Christ, but did not attend church because of his being insulted by an indiscreet, pompous clergyman in downtown Chicago some 20 years ago.

Paul also prays that we become rooted in love. In Ephesians, Paul explains how Salvation is among other things the healing of human relationships. Paul prays that God will grant the readers a solid love -- to keep their feet steady you may say... or love solid as the ground under our feet. This standard is stated over and over again from Christ, throughout Church history.

Some of us may notice Paul is using physical dimensions when calling us to understand. It is pure speculation to point this out -- but, I count four words of dimension -- while our senses recognize only three. Paul prays that God gives us understanding... beyond what we have. Some of us see more clearly than others, but it takes special revelation to understand what is beyond our senses..

On January 23rd, 2015, Bobbie fell in his home and severely broke his arm. He was hospitalized and then transferred to a rehabilitation center.

Bobbie never returned to his home.

We developed a team of caregivers for Bobbie, my rock, Karen Dolan, shoulder to shoulder with me for every step we were to take in our caring for Bobbie. Bobbie's friend Don and Judy Fowler, Angie the nurses aid, and a wide range of experts from lawyers, physicians, tax accountants, realtors...the list goes on and on. All of these folk showed love and commitment to Bobbie on his journey....all have become good friends.

But the greatest experience of this journey was the growth in our love for Bobbie and his love and appreciation for us all even when his powers of communication began to fail.

Paul prays that we will understand Christ's love that "surpasses all understanding". With our minds, we can reason that the whole of Christ's life and death on this earth are a testament of His love. The choice to give his own name and reputation to replace the one we earned for ourselves is a testament of his love. Many people focus on the details of the cross -- as the whole of life of Christ seems too much to understand. We focus on salvation from hell, as we cannot comprehend salvation from a life of focusing on ourselves instead of Christ. If Christ roots us in love for one another, and he has killed conflict between men on the cross - this is part of Christ's love for us. We spend a lifetime understanding this love... and it is deep enough for a lifetime of epiphanies.

On July 17th at 2pm, as Bobbie reached the end of this chapter of his life, he was rapidly losing any ability to speak. However, with tears running down his face, he quietly said I have never felt so much ".L", "O", "V", "E". With those

words, Karen and I felt filled with joy and anticipation for Bobbie's next adventure, in the arms of our loving and gracious God.

Paul prays we may be filled with "all the fullness of God" and Paul's prayer is something that is definitely a continuous process. No matter how much we grow, no matter what our human experiences may be, there is always more fullness from God to fill us even more.

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