

EPISTLE READING FOR JULY 26, 2015

START WITH SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 3:14-21

OBSERVE:

This is a transitional section of the epistle that almost seems to be a conclusion — Paul articulates his heartfelt prayers for the community of faith everywhere, and gives praise and glory to God.

Because this passage begins out of context, we want to know what Paul means by saying *For this reason I kneel before the Father*. For what reason? We must investigate the preceding section in order to find out.

In Ephesians chapter 1 and 2, Paul outlines God's grand plan for the salvation of Jews and Gentiles alike through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And he declares that in Christ Jews and Gentiles are reconciled with God and with one another.

And in Ephesians 3:1-7, Paul is autobiographical, explaining that he has become a , *prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles*— probably playing off of the reality that he has become a literal prisoner of the Romans! He is the servant of the gospel, proclaiming the mystery of God's plan of salvation for the Gentiles; and he assures them that when he suffers they needn't worry because he suffers for their sake.

This is the reason that he kneels before the Father, because he is praying for them, that they might be filled and strengthened in *power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith*.

These first several verses are uniquely Trinitarian – Paul prays to the Father, that power may come through the Spirit, and Christ may dwell in their hearts.

In Ephesians 5:21-6:9, Paul speaks of family relations. It is fascinating that he addresses the concept of family here in chapter 3 when he describes God as *the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name*. As there is family relationship within the Trinity between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, there is family relationship that derives from the Fatherhood of God in heaven and earth.

In keeping with this family relationship and the indwelling reality of the Spirit and Christ, Paul urges the Ephesians to excel in love: *And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, 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*.

The organic image of rootedness in love suggests that this love derives from God, and as this love grows it will open the eyes of the *Lord's holy people* to understand the vast scope of the love of Christ, and they will be filled to the brim with God's fullness!

Finally, Paul completes this little excursion into prayer with a kind of blessing: *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*.

This is not so much a prayer of intercession as it is an affirmation of faith in the willingness of God to exceed all expectations, and a kind of doxology to God – *to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen*.

APPLY:

Stop and think of what this means: *For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. We are the family of God, and owe our family connections and relationships to God. This has powerful implications for victims of broken and dysfunctional families, and for the Christian community.*

As Paul tells us in Romans 8:14-17 and Galatians 4:4-7, we are the “adopted” children of God, adopted for the sake of Christ because of our faith in him. No matter how alienated we may be from our families, from our community, from society, there is a family of which we may be a part!

When we are *being rooted and established in love*, then the vastness of God’s love – in all its dimensions as circumscribed by width, length, height and depth, God’s love becomes clear to us. In other words, God’s love is unlimited!

And to think it begins when the Spirit and Christ himself begin to dwell in our lives. What begins in the interior of our lives, like the root, begins to produce its fruit in our lives and manifests itself in the lives of others! What happens inwardly and individually is also expressed outwardly and corporately! What is being expressed is not mere power, but the power of God’s love at work in and through us!

RESPOND:

At its heart, this prayer is all about what God can and will do for us when we are yielded to him. We find a place to belong in his family; God comes to dwell in our inner being through Christ; we receive power through the Spirit; and his love overflows in and through us.

Then we become aware that God’s blessings surpass what we can possibly imagine — *he is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us*. For the sake of perspective, we do well to remember that these words are written by a man who has been beaten, pelted with stones, arrested, shipwrecked and imprisoned. And yet by faith he is able see beyond all of that suffering to the unsurpassed glory of God.

May I have more and more of that faith!

Our Lord, dwell fully in me, and overflow me with your love! I can pray no better prayer than Paul: 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.

BY TOM LETCHWORTH

<https://soarlectionarybiblestudy.wordpress.com/2015/07/24/epistle-for-july-26-2015/>