

Sunday 15th February 2015 – Rev. Carole Hough

Ephesians 3 vv 14-21

Ephesians gives a **summary** of what Paul considers it means to be a Christian

And over the last few weeks, we have looked at who we are in Christ?

- A deeper understanding of ourselves-
- How we live as Christians?
- A deeper understanding of God and what living in Christ means
- And today- how this takes us into
- A deeper more meaningful response to God-
- And as we are on the threshold of the season of lent and about to take up our Lenten journey it seems a good place to arrive at and to go on from
- The more we explore- the closer we get-
- Rather like starting on a path to climb up a mountain – where you know that there will be amazing views- and that it is a journey worth taking- anticipation- uncertainty- perhaps even a bit fearful-of how things will work out- will the path go near the edge- or will it be clear- will it be narrow & windy-
- it will be an awesome experience- and breath taking

- (Believe it or not I didn't know till I had read Matt's sermon that he used this illustration in 1st week of looking at Ephesians!!- so I must be on the right track!! ☺)
- The deeper we journey into God- the more our Spirit becomes alive-
- & the more we sing the song of who we are in Christ
- **The result** being that **we receive God's blessings** and that as we grow deeper into God so God dwells in us - that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,
- This passage is a **powerful passage-**
- **Paul's prayer is earnest-** it is born out of a real desire , love & passion for the Ephesians-
- It is a heartfelt prayer - not just to bow on his knees- but to fall upon them
- Wonder is that something you have ever felt- were you ever feel so impassioned to pray for someone that it makes you fall upon your knees

- Sometimes when I visit in the hospice or hospital I am overwhelmed by a sense that I should pray for someone – there and then
- ?? reminded me for a moment- Christopher Robin- hush hush whisper who dares CR is saying his prayers!!
- Believe that is God’s doing- and invariably the person will comment that this was just what they needed.
- Paul not simply praying for a specific event or situation-
- His prayer **is all encompassing-**
- He is praying as a Father would do for his children- as Christ does for his disciples- John 17- Gospel reading we just heard.
- And the prayer is about life in Christ- takes us back to the beginning of Ephesians-
- It is about those who love Christ – in whom Christ lives- and whom the Spirit leads into all fullness

"he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, ¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love"

- We know from other letters Paul has written to early believers that he cares deeply about the way that they are living and often his words give a sense of his real concern for the well being of these believers
- He has seen people turn away from God- fall out through petty disagreements – return to the ways of the world – and into sin – with the resulting falling from grace that inevitably leads to chaos and corruption
- **his impassioned prayer is that these believers will be rooted & grounded**
 - Brings to mind the picture of the Vine- John 15-
 - The imagery brings into focus what it means to dwell in God-
 - To live in God’s love
 - It is to be rooted & grounded-

- Then we as believers- and as his church will flourish and grow new buds- and shoots
 - But if we are not grounded in the way of Christ who leads to God- then our roots are only shallow
 - And in danger of wilting and dying
 - So it is with the Church-
 - A Church grounded in the scriptures and prayer and community and love will be alive and nurturing and compassionate- displaying the gifts of the Spirit-
 - Love, Joy, patience, kindness, goodness, etc
 - A Church where the Spirit is alive will be embracing, inclusive and forgiving
 - A Church alive in the Spirit will be a beacon of hope in a world of doubt & fear & uncertainty-
 - It will give light to those that are in darkness- who are troubled by the insecurities and the fleetingness of life -
 - EG Visiting when there appears to be no change- like friends who visit alcoholics- help them clean up their flat not juts once- time & again they show what it means to be grounded & rooted in love
- EG- Christian who has been supporting / befriending someone with cancer- walking with them through the dark days
 - EG- Someone who works in Care Home for people with dementia- wants to be alongside and bring something of the love of God not nly to the residents but also to their nearest & dearest
 - EG - couple giving thanks for 60 yrs of Christian marriage - relying not only on their love for one another but also on the power of God's love and faithfulness.
 - Paul's prayer is not one for an immediate fix "Lord please do this for me now" but it is one that encapsulates the need for us to be in relationship-
 - That as we journey through all the different landscapes of life together, so God journeys with us.
- Paul knows the reality of human frailty he has been there himself-
- He knows how easy it is to be distracted- led away from what is the true goal of the believer
 - He has seen & experienced it-
 - He wants these believers to experience how huge the love of God is

- He asks that we might be able to somehow understand the vast dimensions of Gods love for us - not just as some academic exercise but so that we might be open to experience His love and so know something of the fullness of life and power that God gives.
- love that is all about the resounding YES that God shouts over each one of us.

As we begin our journey through Lent this week- maybe we want to consider what our response would be to Paul's prayer-

Could it be

- Yes I will give myself to you completely,
- yes I will work through all difficulties with you,
- yes I accept you with all your faults, problems-
- it is the kind of love that is at the very heart of the Christian faith offered to all .
- It's the source of love that fuels and sustains 60 years of marriage
- It is an example of the way in which God loves us with an inexhaustible immensely dimensioned love that continues to do more than we could ever begin to ask or imagine.

- The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases- it is new every morning-
- Love that is transformational-
- That showers blessings upon those who live & dwell in it
- That holds up- that renews that hopes & endures-
- The Love of God
- It is into this that Paul prays the believers will know what it means to live in Christ
- And for the Spirit to dwell in them
- Where all things are possible
- Paul finishes with a Benediction that we often use at the end of our Church Service- (A benediction – meaning a short, concise statement given in the Bible in the form of a petition, an assurance, a promise or principle. It voices images of protection, or comfort, or abundance, or a word of assurance, to voice good thoughts, to pronounce. What makes good thoughts good is that they are based on Truth, based on Principle, God. Good is the inevitable result of the certainty and righteousness of Truth, God, who is all good.)

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,

²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen