

**Ephesians 3:14-21**  
**(Psalm 63:1-8; Matthew 6:5-15)**  
**“For This Reason I Bow My Knees”**

**Introduction**

This weekend, our nation remembers and celebrates the life of Martin Luther King. Dr. King may be best remembered for his iconic “I Have A Dream” speech, in which he cast a vision of a world free from the kinds of prejudices and hatreds that create walls between people and rob children of the opportunity to pursue their hopes and dreams. He called America’s constitutional provisions for all people a “promissory note” on which the nation had defaulted, and he challenged the nation to keep its promises, to be what it once promised to become. He said that African-Americans had gathered that day in the nation’s capitol to cash the check given them by virtue of being American citizens.

Dr. King’s life was borne along by that dream, even when it cost him comfort and safety and, finally, life itself. His vision was good and just and lovely, but seemed unattainable in our lifetime. Certainly few of us alive then thought that we would live to see an African-American two-term president.

In this Ephesian letter, Paul has been proclaiming the very message that worked its way as salt and light throughout the western world, changing views of human worth and patterns of governance, and creating a culture in which one could declare that “all men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights.” Such views were simply the outgrowth of what Paul wrote in chapter two of this letter, that the gospel tears down the walls between Jews and Gentiles, creating a new humanity in Christ where race and status and all the other things that divide us no longer matter.

In this morning’s text, Paul prays for the church, and in his prayer he seeks to cash the gospel’s promissory note: the promise that God is creating a new humanity in Christ. Paul has just written (3:13) that everything he is suffering as a prisoner is for the glory of the church. Tying our text to that sentence, we hear Paul say, “So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. For this reason I bow my knee before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named” (3:13-15).

*Make no mistake, Paul is asking for nothing less than that God himself provide the power for his promises to be fulfilled in us, who are his children, members of the new humanity in Christ. Let’s be honest from the start: what he asks sounds, not only incredible, but impossible. Yet, this is his prayer, his hope and dream for us. Do we dare to step into this prayer, and to begin to learn to pray in this way for ourselves and our families, and for one another?*

## Body

1. **On what basis does Paul dare to pray in this way and expect an answer (3:14-17a)?**

### ***He appeals to the riches of our Father's glory (3:16a).***

Two things to note here: First, Paul calls God “the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.” He is again emphasizing God’s love for all people, not only for the Jews or for certain Gentiles, or for those who agree with you and me theologically. God’s love is vast and breaks down the walls we build between one another.

Secondly, Paul appeals to “the riches of his glory.” He has already in this letter appealed to “the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us” (1:7), and “the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints” (1:18). The key is this: God is not stingy, but lavish in his generosity, and when we pray, we dishonor him if we act as though we must somehow wrest a little favor from an unwilling deity. When we pray, we are appealing to the riches of our Father’s grace, which he lavishes on us in Christ Jesus.

### ***He appeals to the Spirit's empowering presence in our inner being (3:16b).***

It is, once again, no little power that Paul requests. He is not pleading that we might have just enough battery power to get us through the day. The word Paul uses for the Spirit’s empowering presence in the life of God’s children is *dunamis*, from which we get the word dynamite. It is the power that spoke forth the explosion of this cosmos, the power that raised Christ from the dead, and the power that calls a new humanity into being in Christ.

It is, I think, an absence of that tremendous truth being foundational in both our self-understanding and in our daily experience that keeps so many of us frustrated in our attempts to follow Jesus. We seek to do it just as we do everything else – in our own strength and wisdom. But when the Spirit begins to take increasing control, changing our affections, desires and ability to follow Jesus, everything begins to change.

### ***He appeals to our union with Christ (3:17a).***

Paul has written repeatedly in this letter of our being “in Christ.” Now he rounds out the idea of our union with Christ. We are in Christ, because Christ is *in us* through faith. Every blessing of God’s grace comes to us through our union with Christ. This is, in fact, the central fact of our salvation, which alone enables us to claim forgiveness, new life, and hope of the resurrection. It is

the core doctrine of Christianity, that the Son of God became human so that humans might become the sons and daughters of God.

If you are God's child, you are not alone, trying to get by with the natural gifts you have been given. You are now joined to Christ. He is with you and in you by his Spirit. Everything that you do matters to him, and therefore your life matters ultimately – even those things that otherwise would seem so very insignificant.

## **2. What, exactly, does Paul ask of God (3:17b-19)?**

***He asks that we be rooted and grounded in love (3:17b).***

Paul uses two metaphors here, agricultural and architectural. We are to be rooted in the *agape*, self-sacrificial love of Christ with which he has loved us. We draw our life from this love, just as plants draw water and nourishment through their roots. Are you being nourished by Christ's love for you, or do you draw your strength from envy, anger, greed, lust and pride? What do you think about as you lie in your bed at night? What brings you joy and grief?

The second metaphor calls us to build our lives upon the rock of Christ's love, rather than upon the shifting sand of this present age's false hopes and promises. So, Paul asks that we draw upon the power of God within us to feed our souls on the love with which we have been loved, and to refuse to take into our hearts whatever is a denial of that love. And he prays that we might build upon a solid foundation of love that will stand amid the storms and ravages of time.

***He asks that we comprehend the vastness of Christ's love (3:18-19a).***

Closely related is the second request: that we not only experience unreflectively the love of Christ, but that we study it, and meditate upon it, begin to comprehend it. Paul describes this love lavishly, much as he does at the end of Romans eight, where he asks, "What can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"?

As one meditates upon his prayer that we "may have strength 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 all knowledge," one realizes that Christ's love is truly cosmic in its scope. God looks upon all that he has made, not only the families of the earth, but earth itself, and our solar system and galaxy and the vast reaches of the cosmos, and all is embraced in his love.

Yet he knows your name and mine, and carries us in his heart, even as he dwells in our hearts through faith. Such comprehension should change everything about the way we view others, and view the world around us,

from the smallest, seemingly insignificant things to things that seem completely overwhelming.

***He asks that we be filled with all the fullness of God (3:19b).***

This request surpasses comprehension. It is, in fact, a fool's request, unless we are, indeed, children of God. Paul does not ask that we may be filled with a measure of Christ, or with some small divine particle. He asks that we "may be filled with all the fullness of God." What he means by this is beyond my poor powers to understand or explain. But I can say this much, even as the church fathers wrote in their comments on this text: All that is the Father's has been given to the Son. If the Son has joined us to himself, then all that is his is also ours.

## **Conclusion**

How can we even imagine such intimacy with God through the indwelling Spirit uniting us to Christ? How can we, who so often fail to keep even the simplest resolutions, who are so very prone to wander away from the Lord's loving purposes for us, how dare we imagine that such a possibility is ours? For one reason only: Paul ends as he began, with an appeal to the power of God to do what we cannot do for ourselves, but what God has promised to do in and through us:

"Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (3:19-21).

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