

*Sermon on Ephesians 3:14-21 prepared by Jonathan Shradar*

*Stand for the reading of the Word*

**Ephesians 3:14-21**

**The will of God is for His church to be filled with his love.**

**John 12:12–15** “The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. [13] So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” [14] And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,

[15] “Fear not, daughter of Zion;  
behold, your king is coming,  
sitting on a donkey’s colt!” (ESV)

Just after raising Lazarus from the dead Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem And the people cry “Hosanna!” “Save please!”

The hoped for king had come, the One promised to set everything right. Salvation was coming, but maybe not merely in the way they had requested that day on the road.

The physical experience of the arrival of Jesus.

Studying Ephesians leading up to Holy Week, I am struck that Jesus entered Jerusalem to make us into the dwelling place of God.

I am also struck by how profound of a shift that is from what came before.

**Psalm 91:1–2** “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High  
will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.

[2] I will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress,  
my God, in whom I trust.” (ESV)

From God being our dwelling place, to making us his home. A shift worked by the event in Jerusalem from this Palm Sunday onward.

**Ephesians 2:20–22** “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, [21] in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. [22] In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” (ESV)

Here is Paul, now praying into this design. That more than a shell - the body of Christ, the church - would be filled with all the fullness of God.

This is the experience of the presence of God, of the love of Christ, of the gospel made more than information, made a sensation. Mystical. Beautiful and something for the church.

Paul bows his knees, not the usual posture for prayer (standing), but continuing the humble response to the mystery of Christ.

And now, according to the riches of the Father’s glory, out of the expansiveness of God, he prays the will of God, for the people of God. For the love of Christ to fill us.

So this Palm Sunday is all about receiving love when we most need it.

“There is, in this passage a complete, full theology of Christian experience: what it means not just to know there is a God, but to experience God; not just to know there is a God who loves, but to experience his love; not just to know there is a God of fullness and glory, but to experience and be filled with it.” Timothy J. Keller

Three movements, our capacity for love, how love changes us, and what the fullness of God is.

### 1. **The Love of Christ abounds beyond our capacity.**

Our view of love is always skewed. Especially when our experience or framework of it is shared among one broken person to another. Even when we have some glimpse of real love, we can lose it because we leak.

Dave Wilcox - *Break in the Cup*

“I try so hard to please you  
To be the love that fills you up  
I try to pour on sweet affection  
But I think you got a broken cup.  
Because you can't believe I love you  
I try to tell you that there is no doubt  
But as soon as fill you with all I've got  
That little break will let it run right out

We cannot trade empty for empty  
We must go to the waterfall  
For there's a break in the cup that holds love  
A break in the cup that holds love  
A break in the cup that holds love  
Inside us all”

I agree with the imagery of there being a break in the cup... but when it comes to divine love, love from our Creator toward us, our cup is changed under the waterfall...

God is love.

**1 John 4:7–12** “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. [8] Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. [9] In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. [10] In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. [11] Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. [12] No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.”  
(ESV)

Our inclination is to put this love in a box, to manage it, to grasp it. But this is a love that is so far beyond us.

Everything that Paul has written should rightly bolster faith. Radical stuff if we have eyes to see it.

But enveloping all of that is the love of God. It is “great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses...”

Paul prays this trinitarian prayer - where the Father wills it, the Spirit accomplishes it, and Christ moves into it - to increase our capacity for love.

The remaking Jesus works in our lives includes an increased capacity to receive love, to receive him.

“To be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”

The inner being means your heart. That’s all it means. It means your center.

[The result of being strengthened by God is “that Christ may dwell in your hearts” (Eph. 3:17). Since Christ dwells in the hearts of believers from the moment of conversion, this must refer to living under the indwelling influence and continual presence of Christ.]

“Christ in you: “The only way to understand what he is saying is this: If it’s really true that all the Christians have Christ dwelling in their hearts by faith, then he must be saying it’s one thing to have money in the bank and another thing to draw it. You can have a billion dollars and live poor. So it’s one thing to have Christ living in your heart; it’s another thing to experience it. It’s one thing to actually have the fullness of God in your life; it’s another thing to actually experience it.” Timothy J. Keller

Something that increases in us.

“The main idea is this: just as the ill or infirm need to be strengthened so they can take in all that life has to offer, so also God’s children need to be inwardly strengthened to receive all the blessings God desires for them.” Hughes

Enlarged capacity to receive this love of God.

This is a work of grace. Notice there is nothing you do here. At best you hold a humble posture following Paul's example. But this is all receiving. God is at work pouring the love of the Father into our hearts by the Spirit.

'The Spirit of God heightens your awareness, helps you see more of reality, enhances. It heightens and strengthens and awakens. The way in which the Spirit gives you joy is it shows you more of reality instead of less...'

The house is being made a home.

Gable Price - *Touch your Robe*

"I just wanna touch Your robe  
Catch a glimpse of Your heart  
I just wanna give You all  
Of my alabaster jar  
I wanna know You  
I don't care what it costs  
I just wanna touch Your robe

'Cause when You made Your heart my home  
You didn't make me take my shoes off  
You didn't care what I stepped in  
'Cause when You say I'm clean, I'm clean"

We are being built together into a dwelling place for God... that Christ may dwell in our hearts. And this building, remaking happens through love in the flesh.

"In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

Jesus entering Jerusalem to give himself for you.

He is fully aware of who you are and what you've done; and in love he says "mine, that one is my home."

May the Father grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

## **2. The love of Christ remakes our lives.**

“...that you, being rooted and grounded in love,” Paul is using both agricultural and architectural imagery, growing from a foundation.

What grows is comprehension of his love, the immensity of it, with the saints, with the church.

Paul’s letter will shift after this prayer to the ethical response to the gospel, how we live now in light of Christ. And all of it, every action, motivation, has to start here at the love of Christ.

This prayer, then, sets the stage for Paul’s later exhortations, including his main command for the Ephesians to “walk in love” (Eph. 5:2).”

We will not be fully mature until this love is planted in our hearts. We will not live as God’s holy ones until we know that we are first of all his beloved ones. We will not treat our neighbors with mercy until we apprehend Christ’s mercy toward us. We do not know anything about Christianity until we know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

Anchored in it, we communally comprehend how far it goes. From unsearchable riches to comprehension and love that surpasses knowledge. Knowing from top to bottom.

Where increased capacity seems individual enough, the remaking of lives by the love of Christ is for the whole body, for the church.

[this is not to be our solitary, individualistic, isolated occupation, for we are to do it together—“with all the saints.” We can only come to a better, fuller understanding of his love in community! This happens when we sit under the preaching of his Word. It happens when we study it together and discuss it. It happens when we share our knowledge of God’s love with each other. It happens when we observe it in our brothers and sisters. It happens as our hearts go upward in the worship of him. We need each other in order to comprehend his Word.]

Think of it this way. I am confident everyone here has some experience with the Pacific Ocean. Just twenty minutes from here, we all have at least seen it. Most of us have been in it. Some have tasted it!

But the coast of California is only one vantage point of this mighty ocean.

Thankfully, some of us have been to Hawaii - where the water is warmer - it fills the air differently. It is though, still the same water coming toward us in wave after wave.

Further still, some of us have been to the Philippines... or Tahiti, and have experienced the beauty of clear water and white sand.

Or you have been to Alaska and have witnessed the cold brute force of the Pacific.

And we all come together to share our experience of the Pacific in community and our comprehension grows. What we learn changes how we encounter it and approach it. Harness its power for play or purpose.

It is the same thing with the love we are rooted and grounded in. You remind me of its breadth, I remind you of its length. The kids discover it's height, and we sing of its depth.

And it shapes how we live. We learn to surf a specific way. Rescue people this way. Harness the power of this love this way.

From the inner peace of Christ dwelling in each of us - this house being built together calls strangers and alliance to come home to Christ. To experience the forgiveness of sin, rest, purpose, security, and identity.

Together we surrender to this love, and live it out in community, with all the saints.

### **3. The love of Christ is the fullness of God.**

Think of the Pacific again. We have an increasingly bigger picture as we grow but we have never held it all. Never taken the full measure of the ocean.

Paul is praying here that the church, that we would be filled with that which is beyond contemplation. “That you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

Usually we want just enough of God to get by. That though is not what the Father desires. He wants all of him for all of you.

That shift from the LORD being our dwelling place to us growing into a holy temple, his dwelling place is a glimpse of the remaking of the world.

“Fullness” most likely denotes God’s moral excellence or perfections, including his presence, life, power, and especially love. Paul is praying that his readers would comprehend Christ’s love for them and that God would fill them so that they attain his perfections (especially love).”

I don’t even have words to describe it. I can’t say for sure what it feels like. But I know it is the will of God for us. His word says so.

This fullness is the love of Christ toward us. That the man on the donkey is God come to give himself for us. To show us real love. To give us peace. To make us into his dwelling place.

And it’s to his glory that he does this in us. That is why Paul’s prayer turns to praise.

**Ephesians 3:20–21** ‘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, [21] to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.’ (ESV)

Being filled with all the fullness of God is something far more abundantly than we ask or think. It is an amazing gift. It is grace. It is the love of God.

“One of the main differences between Christianity and moral religion in general is that Christians believe only through the influence of the Holy Spirit are we able and enabled to do anything good. Only through the Holy Spirit can we grow. It’s through the Spirit’s work anything gets accomplished in our lives, not through our own effort.” TK



“the job of the Spirit of God is to make the truth about Jesus Christ shine, if the job of the Spirit of God is to show you his beauty, is to dazzle you and to fill your mind and heart with him then what does it mean to be filled with the Spirit?

It means to be flooded with his truth. It means to let the Spirit, who is always talking to you about one thing and only one thing, and that is Jesus Christ, the fairest among 10,000. That’s all the Spirit of God ever wants to talk about. He’s like the artist in love, you see. He’s boring unless you’re in love with the same thing, and then he’s the most interesting person in the world.” TK

The Holy Spirit orchestrates the endowment of the strength that is freely given to us according to the scale of his riches. We are renewed and empowered for life, and we grow stronger and stronger even while our bodies grow old. We are frail containers pulsating with divine power!

This is the way it’s supposed to be.

**The will of God is for His church to be filled with his love.**

*Pray this way - humble, hungry.*

three things the third race must put on its prayer list:

1. prayer for an inner strengthening so as to enhance our capacity to hold what he has for us,
2. prayer for love so our practical lives will be rooted in love and so we will further understand and experience his unfathomable love, and
3. prayer for ever-growing fullness in this life and in eternity.

*Experience the love of Christ - let it shape you, for the glory of God.*

“Hosanna!” “Save please.” So often our petitions are smaller than we realize - rescue by Jesus is bigger than we imagine - and it is good. The real experience of his love is available, and it’s the will of God for us to own it.

May we know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God.