

## Ephesians 3:14-end

There's been an idea, a nagging, a prompting from God for a while now.

As we've met as a leadership team, Andrea, Linda, Margaret, Brian and myself, as we met with our Mission Enabler a few weeks ago, looking at how we come out of lockdown and grow the church and then, as we met as a PCC last weekend, one of the PCC members spoke the idea clearly in one phrase.

### INSIDE OUT

And today, we see this clearly here in Paul's prayer to the Ephesians

We are living through difficult times, a time of real uncertainty. Life is quite crazy right now. The storms of life are raging. We long for things to be better. We long for leaders to make wise choices, for friends to stop suffering, for family to make good & healthy choices in life. We pray that the buffeting of this life will ease for them. But my friends, the world will always be the world. There will always be craziness to deal with – always.

Our home group have been studying 2 Timothy where Paul is handing over his ministry to Timothy and he warns him about the last, crazy days.

He says this in 2 Timothy 3:1-4 *But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days.<sup>2</sup> People will be lovers of themselves.... And he lists a whole bunch of things...lovers of money... ungrateful, ...conceited, lovers of pleasure.... rather than lovers of God—*

The world is full of stuff that tries to knock us off course.

It's like being in a boat that is buffeted on all sides. So, think of yourself as a boat being buffeted around by the storms of life. We can't control the storms, but we can strengthen the boat to ride the storm. We can spend far too much time trying to change what is going on out there whereas, what we really need is to be strengthened in here.

Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:14 *But as for you....But as for **you**, continue in what you have learned and firmly believe.*

The only way to change the world is by changing ourselves.

The hope for our future, the hope in all the craziness of this world is found in the prayer of Paul to the Ephesians...Let me read it to you again.

*<sup>14</sup> For this reason I kneel before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family<sup>[a]</sup> in heaven and on earth derives its name. <sup>16</sup> I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup> 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, <sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

Isn't that a great prayer?

It really struck me as I read the prayer. How often do I pray this kind of prayer? When was the last time I heard this kind of prayer being prayed?

So often we pray for peace, for comfort, for healing for the ones we know and love. All good prayers.

But when was the last time we got on our knees, either physically or metaphorically - cos it's not about the posture it's about the attitude..... and prayed, earnestly prayed, crying out to God, that they would be strengthened on the inside, that they would be rooted and established in love, that they may have the power, to grasp how wide, and long and high and deep is the love of Christ?

Things may get rocky in the next few months...things will always get rocky. But let's be a praying church and commit to praying this prayer for one other.

Let's take a close look to reveal the amazing depth of this prayer.

*For this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.*

We are reminded that we all come from God, he is creator and sustainer of all. We are only here because he put us here. We only breathe because he enables us to breathe. In prayer, we come before a mighty God.

John in his vision on the Island of Patmos, caught a glimpse of God's glory. As recorded in Rev 4. I would like to read you a few verses from Revelation 4 and I invite you to close your eyes and imagine being there, looking at the scene...

*'there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. <sup>3</sup> And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. <sup>4</sup> Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. <sup>5</sup> From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. <sup>6</sup> Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.*

*It goes on, Day and night the four never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty," who was, and is, and is to come.'*

*<sup>9</sup> Whenever the living creatures give glory, honour and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:*

*<sup>11</sup> 'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.'*

What an amazing image of the abundance of heaven, the glory of God.

And Paul prays that out of His glorious riches... and so we get on our knees, recognising his awesomeness and his power and we beseech him, we cry out to him.

Lord, will you strengthen the people that I love, the people I bring before you today, will you strengthen them with power through your Spirit in their inner being...

This is the prayer we need to be praying.

Do we pray for good exam results for those children receiving GCSE & A-level and other tests over the summer?

Do we pray for good health for friends, for wisdom for doctors?

Do we pray for peace for the anxious, rest for the weary?

Do we pray for people to act sensibly as Covid restrictions are lifted?

Maybe, just maybe, we need less praying about circumstances and the bad stuff in the world and more prayer for inner renewal and strength.

Pray that out of God's glorious riches they will be strengthened with power through His Spirit in their inner being.

In Ezekiel 36 – God said the day will come when I put my spirit in their hearts. On the inside.

God's spirit that is powerful and can change our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh.

Pumping hearts flowing with the Holy Spirit where, if you believe, Christ can live.

*I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*

God working from the inside out – not the outside in...

Not us putting in rules and structures to make ourselves or others change, but God changing us and other from the inside out.

We don't need church that just puts on loads of programmes or set up clever systems to keep everyone happy. That will never work. Whatever the church tries to do there will always be people who moan because this wasn't right or that wasn't right.

Church is about coming together and together being strengthened by the Holy Spirit out of God's riches, about growing together in Christ,

Church is about growing in Christ, being strengthened by the Holy spirit.

Church is not about protecting people from the world.

You've probably heard the analogy of church as a lifeboat, rather than a cruise ship. We don't meet on a Sunday morning for relaxation, or entertainment, for everything to be done for us.

Church is about equipping us to go out into the storms of life, to be strengthened together and to go out to rescue others for Christ.

To mix my metaphors, Church is about putting down firm roots, deep roots of faith.

Our prayer is that we will all become rooted and established in love, we as individuals to be rooted, deeply, securely rooted in love.

Did any of you hear the news story of the Oyster farmers who were complaining about how the pollution caused by Southern Water was ruining their Oysters. As filter feeders what they are immersed in affects their flavour.

Like us, if we are immersed in the world, then our default may be to complain about things.

If we are immersed, if we are deeply rooted in love – then that's the flavour that will come out!

We, as church are called to be different from the world.

*And so, we 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,*

We as individuals and we as the Lords people together. To know that this love surpasses all knowledge.

That's an interesting phrase, isn't it? How can we know something that is beyond knowing?

Well, that's kind of the point....it's not about our preaching and teaching. It's not about our learning in home groups.

God's love can't be taught it's got to be caught. And may I encourage you to listen to worship songs, there is something about singing, about being caught up in in worship of God that can open a channel to God's love.

Church is not about learning and doing good things – it's about opening our hearts, wanting to be changed, longing to know more about God and Jesus and his all-surpassing love.

We're nearly there....and what does Paul pray next? That we may *be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God!* All the fullness of God! Can you imagine that? I think, if God really came fully to live in my heart, I'd explode. But that is Paul's heart-felt prayer for all of us, to know God's fullness. For it is God alone who can transform lives.

The Passion translation puts it like this: *this extravagant love pours into you until you are filled to overflowing with the fullness of God!*

Will you make this your goal? To seek to be filled with the fullness of God?

If you want to see transformation in others and in our world, this is the prayer to pray. Filled and overflowing with love. As Christians, we need to be known as different. We are born of the Spirit, we belong to a different king, live in a different kingdom. As written in 1 Peter,

<sup>9</sup> *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

If we are not different, what is there to attract others to Christ? There is a power within us, there is the Holy Spirit living in us, we have the fullness of God living within us.

So, this morning will you,

- be open to being strengthened, in your inner being
- Seek God in prayer so you may be rooted and established in love. The love Christ won for us on the cross.
- And pray for one another that we may all be strengthened from the inside out – so that whatever the world throws at us we may stand firm in that love.

And finally, my prayer is that we may be a church that is indeed inside out...that being strengthened on the inside, we may take the light and love of Christ out, wherever we go.

And how does this prayer end...? Verse 20

<sup>20</sup> *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,*

By opening up our hearts to follow Christ, opening our hearts to the powerful work of the Holy Spirit within you. God is able to do more, immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine...So have big dreams! God can do immeasurably more!

And verse 21 *'to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*