

Reflection
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July 26, 2015
17th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

Ephesians 3: 14-21

**For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,
From whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.
I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in
your inner being with power through his Spirit.**

Ephesians represent letters written by the Apostle Paul, or more likely one of his early followers, to the early Christians living in the city of Ephesus, which is located in Turkey, near the modern city of Izmir. In Greek and Roman times, Ephesus was a center of trade and commerce, and was especially known for its Temple to Artemis (a Greek Goddess). This temple was considered to be one the Seven Wonders of the World. The Apostle Paul lived in Ephesus for several years spreading the Gospel of Jesus. It was also visited by the Apostle John where he spent his time laying down the foundations of the Church, and where he may have brought Mary after the death of Jesus to live nearby.

When I was asked to reflect on a portion of the Ephesians, the first revelation I had was realizing that Ephesians simply meant people of Ephesus. The second revelation I had was realizing that my wife, Susan, and I had actually been to Ephesus a few years ago, and had the opportunity to walk through the ruins of this beautiful city and visit the nearby House of Mary. At the time I did not connect it with the Ephesians contained in the Bible, but was never the less moved by the majesty and spirit of this ancient city. It was not hard to imagine the vitality and life that once filled its space, with its houses, theater, colosseum, and market. Now, just like the port which has since dried up and disappeared without any obvious trace, the early events of Christianity that took place there are only evident if one takes the time to explore the writings attributed to Paul. Reflecting on Ephesians, this past month has made the visit to Ephesus take on a new depth, and likewise remembering the visit to Ephesus has provided a new context for reflecting on Ephesians.

Ephesians is composed of letters containing teachings that helped unite the various factions, of the early church in Ephesus. They are in their most basic interpretation, letters that instruct the early Christians to remember the Essence of Christ's Teachings, to remember the Love that Jesus brought into the world, shared with humanity, and implored others to make a living part of themselves. The letters also urged these early Christians to live as a Community, grounded in Christ's Love. A message that is as relevant today as it was in the time of Paul.

For me, the writings in this section of Ephesians comes down to two words, Love and Community, and this has been what, more than anything else, has drawn me to SPC. It is the reinforcement, encouragement, sharing, and support of these two words, given each Sunday, that draws me back again and again, and makes me want to take an active part in the Life of the Church. As Pastor Tremba has said many times, this world is truly a dangerous place. While these dangers cannot be avoided, our faith in God's Love, and the Strength of a caring community can provide a pair of strong shoes to protect our feet from the thorns and hot stones upon which we walk.

Ephesians continues:

I pray that you may know the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge, so that you may be filled with the fullness of God.

The phrase, "surpasses all knowledge", is one that for me serves as a basis for both my faith and my desire to directly experience this thing called the Love of God. It is what keeps me wanting to strive to understand the Mystery of this Creation. When my children were young, our bedtime routine each night included this short prayer: *"May the Peace of God, which passeth beyond all Understanding, and which man can neither give nor take away, fill our hearts and our minds with the Knowledge of the Love of God."* Reading Ephesians reminded me that the very reason I chose those words for the night time prayer and spoke them in the quiet dusk or dim light of a night light was to instill a sense of Mystery and Universal Love in my children. It is both amazing and perhaps understandable that it was my youngest daughter, Morgan, who brought my wife and I into the fold of SPC, even though we had lived in Shepherdstown for more than twenty years and were good friends with so many SPC members.

As one gets older, the travail of Life seems to become more present. What outlasts and survives this universal travail? It is only God's Love.

An untold number of generations have come and gone
And only Love Abides.
Each of us, sooner or later, in our lives faces a loss that is hard to bear
And only Love Abides
We see and may even be caught up in the Violence of the World
And only Love Abides
We all experience the Loss of Worldly Love
What was rich and unending
Flows away like a river
Only God's Love Abides

Reflecting on Ephesians reminded me of how great is the gift of this human form. Through this Gift, we consciously get to experience this Great Mystery! In the words of a song written by the Scottish Bard, Robin Williamson, "What is it that we are a part of, and what is it that we are."

Elaborating on an idea in a poem I heard on the radio:

Thank you to all the atoms that agreed to come together to form the elements that make up this Creation.
Thank you to all the molecules that agreed on some level to come together to form the cells that make up this Body Divine
Thank you to all the organs that agreed to work together for this short period of time, so that I could experience this Great Mystery and Seek to Find My Place.
Thank you for this Gift of Soul and Consciousness that I May Someday Come to Know the Love of God.

In Ephesians, I am reminded that the challenge is not to transform the world but to rather transform ourselves, to transform our consciousness so that we may realize the Love of God that passes beyond all understanding.

Science tells us that all the elements, other than hydrogen, were formed in stars and spread throughout the Universe as they collapsed and exploded. Silver, gold, carbon, oxygen and on and on... What an amazing thing to know that we are truly composed of stardust. Yet another Great Blessing and Hint of Who we truly are.

As all these organs, cells, elements, and atoms someday dissolve back into His Creation, May these Blessings bestowed upon us, be the Beginning of the Love Which Man Can Neither Give nor Take Away.

Love Abides.

To God, All Praise and Glory.

Amen.