**Sermon Sunday 25th July 2021, Trinity 8 by Rev’d Graham Phillips**

Ephesians 3.14-21

John 6.1-21

Are you strong? Are you full of power? I’m not talking about a physical strength, I’m talking about a spiritual strength, that comes from God. Paul, in this wonderful letter to the church in Ephesus, is writing a prayer, a prayer to God the Father, in which he asks that God out of the riches of his glory, out of the abundance of the treasury of his glory, God may grant the reader - that includes you and me - to be strengthened and reinforced in our inner being, with power. Not reinforced concrete, not sinews of muscle, not tendons joining bone to muscle, but God’s power, supernatural strength flooding our innermost being with his divine might and catalytic spiritual power.

And this power is for two purposes - one, that Christ may dwell, may settle down, may abide, may make His permanent home in our hearts through faith. Christ himself released and living deep inside us. A peace producing presence that calms, invigorates and energises.

This leads to the second purpose - that we may be rooted and grounded in love. God’s love. A love that is so vast, so broad, so long, so high, so deep, that it is beyond all we can envisage. This is not a 60 minute Sunday morning tick the box sort of nice love, this is a deep sonorous love, with colour and vitality, explosions of brightness, and purity, a rich life giving, joy filled love, that makes us laugh and laugh, till our sides ache and yet we want to laugh more. A love that makes us want to dance and sing, and twirl and jump, and run and skip, do somersaults and cartwheels and hug and smile and hug more. This is the sort of love God has for us.

Will you step into it? Will you let it fill you, every part of your being? Will you breath it in, drink it in, soak it up till it fills you and keeps filling you? This is what Paul is praying in these verses - that all of us will have the divine power to see and understand, and comprehend the enormity and wonder of God’s love for each of us. When we do - it transforms us. Even glimpsing it, changes us, gives us a different perspective on life. The elixir of God’s love is intoxicating and once touched you want more and more of it, because nothing else in the world is as important, as vitalising as this love.

This is what Paul is praying for.

Jesus, when he walked on this earth knew this love, which is shown so strongly in this beautiful story of the feeding of the 5000.

Jesus starts by asking his disciples the difficult question, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” So often we evade the glaringly obvious problem - we side step it, move around it, it becomes the immovable rock in a relationship, the stumbling block in an organisation because we do not have the answer, the solution. We cannot fix it. So we pretend it is not there, we turn a blind eye to it and try and ignore it. Families have this - the socially awkward aunt, the drug dependent cousin, the violent argumentative father. We cannot solve it.  But Jesus can, and this story shows us that.

God takes the little that we have to offer and magnifies it. One pack lunch fed 5000 people and they even filled 12 baskets of leftovers, enough for a take home bag for many - no cooking tonight. That is some multiplication. The boy offered his pack lunch and I bet he was as pleased as punch to have done that. If he had held onto it then the miracle would not have happened. If he had said, “No, mum made this for me, I need this”, and gone off and quietly eaten it by himself then God’s glory would not have been revealed. Instead he became part of something far bigger than he could have imagined. The  breadth and length and height and depth of God’s love was revealed that day. Out of the riches of God’s glory, God acted and to the astonishment of all magnified a pack lunch by over 5000 times.

What can you offer to God today? Time to listen to someone, that neighbour you find exhausting? To pray for an issue you saw on the news, or an individual who is unwell? God may multiply your prayers by a thousand fold. Even five thousand fold. Or maybe you have given money to a charity. Do you realise how this is so much more than a fiscal transaction? It is so encouraging when people respond to needs for money, the impact on the recipient is enormous - they feel valued, affirmed, loved. It is so heart warming - so humbling - we have experienced it when people have responded to appeals for the church or for individuals. God multiplying the fiscal transactions and filling it with his grace and love.

What about that letter you wrote to Amnesty International to that person unfairly in prison? The impact of strangers from a foreign country naming an injustice elsewhere, has an effect that far outweighs the energy and time put into the writing of the letter, impacting prison officers, judges, police and society. God exploding his authority into unjust situations.

Then that smile you gave to that stranger. I still remember a person smiling at me on a day when I was feeling burdened - a complete stranger. But their genuine warm smile lifted my soul, dispelled the blues, and filled me with joy. A 3 second encounter magnified by God’s grace.

We are about to start two new congregations - two Messy Churches, one in Longden and one in Hanwood. It is daunting. There is a lot to plan and sort - but we are offering it to God and asking that he will magnify our efforts, fill it with his grace, and bless it with his overwhelming, ever flowing love. We offer it and ask God to do what only he can do.

So what do you have that you can offer to God, that God can take and use? Time, money, a smile, a listening ear, a heart for baking, a prayer for that difficult neighbour or relative, that intractable international situation? Talk to God about this. We all have gifts and abilities and passions that God wants us to use in order to bring others into the fullness of his love and he will magnify what we offer, a thousand fold even five thousand fold. And in all of this pray the prayer to the Ephesians for yourself that you may have strength in your inner being to comprehend and know the breadth, the length, the height and the depth of God’s love for us.

Amen

A short meditation

Imagine yourself as a plant. Where do you draw your sustenance from? What energises and feeds you? What are you rooted in? There are so many things we could be rooted in - music, prayer, worship, bible reading, social media, television, walking, talking. What are you rooted in? If you are not sure then what do you spend your time on? We are called to be rooted in God’s love, filled with Christ, drawing nourishment from Christ. It is a mystery, that we will never fully fathom but one worth pursuing.

May Christ through your faith actually dwell, settle down, abide, make His permanent home, in your hearts! May you be rooted deep in love *and* founded securely on love. Ephesians 3.17 Amplified bible classic edition.

Rev’d Graham Phillips

Blessings

Graham Phillips