

“Enough light to see”

Christ Church UM

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Ephesians 1: 15-23

15 Since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, this is the reason that 16 I don't stop giving thanks to God for you when I remember you in my prayers. 17 I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, will give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation that makes God known to you. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart will have enough light to see what is the hope of God's call, what is the richness of God's glorious inheritance among believers, 19 and what is the overwhelming greatness of God's power that is working among us believers. This power is conferred by the energy of God's powerful strength. 20 God's power was at work in Christ when God raised him from the dead and sat him at God's right side in the heavens, 21 far above every ruler and authority and power and angelic power, any power that might be named not only now but in the future. 22 God put everything under Christ's feet and made him head of everything in the church, 23 which is his body. His body, the church, is the fullness of Christ, who fills everything in every way.

During our Eastertide season, we have been looking through the lens of scripture and our own experience to see how love is at work around us and amongst us. At the same time, we have taken a glimpse into some of the workings of the early church and even thought about how their experiences might inform us as a church today.

This passage in Ephesians with an intimate, comfortable greeting. Though in recent years biblical scholars have studied the letters attributed to Paul and because of the varied styles come to question whether they were all written by him, there is absolutely no question that Paul is a very significant figure in the early church. The epistles were written before our four gospels. He was such an important and influential presence that other writers wanted to grab on to his robe tails....and become attached to this church... and his letters.

Paul's own conversion experience was dramatic and radically life changing. He was empowered to share the love of Christ with all he met. Paul made many friends as he traveled among the small church communities that grew up where

he preached and taught. “I have heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people....and I give thanks to God for you.” They didn’t have cell phones. As people moved through their days and passed by people they knew, they would share the news, the latest gossip. “Have you seen Marcus? He’s feeling much better after his long illness. Did you hear about Dorothy’s mother, she was healed, and the pain has been lifted.... Jacob’s daughter is expecting her first baby, they’re hoping for a boy... may they be so blessed..” There were many ways that people demonstrated their faith by caring for the sick and feeding the hungry, and making room for those who were struggling because of a loss. “I have heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people....and I give thanks to God for you.” This is something we could also say to each other. We here are a faithful community. We work together and play together. We are committed to being God’s servants for the world, in many different ways.

Those small, fledgling faith communities loved each other, lived together, worked together, and they must have also had their trials and struggles, just like we do. We know this because Paul’s letters often include suggestions and instructions on how to live and work together in cooperation and peace and create a successful working community.

This morning’s message is a greeting and a blessing and also offers us hope... encouraging us to feel God’s power and presence working among us. “I pray that the eyes of your heart will have enough light to see what is the hope of God’s call.” This is a lovely metaphor. We know that our heart doesn’t have eyes... but eyes are often seen as the lamp of the body....or the window or gateway to the soul. The Greek word for heart in this passage is *kardia*, and can best be understood as the center of our being, both physical and spiritual. The center of our being is at the very core of who we are, our character, our intellect and abilities, our personality. “I pray that the very core of who you are, will be illuminated and open, so you are able to recognize all the hope and wonder and insights that God is putting before you...”

And don’t we all long for hope.

I just visited with my parents who were not feeling especially hopeful and positive. Yes, there seems to be a growing number of things to worry about... to weigh us down. How we manage all of this depends upon our attitude and our approach. This passage reminds us that we have a rich inheritance... with the potential for overwhelming greatness. So much more is possible when we trust God's goodness, and God's guidance, and God's power for love and mercy. We could focus on all that's wrong... and there certainly are many potentially scary things going on... even right around the corner...or we can pay special attention to the possibilities for growth, and community, and wisdom that can lead to prosperity.

This is a hopeful passage.... but hope sometimes seems elusive, or hard to reach, or like a luxury that we can't quite afford to trust.

Where is the spirit of wisdom we need in order to really feel God presence among us?. Sometimes we might ask ourselves, "Where is the hope? What are the riches of God's glorious inheritance that are promised for us? How is God using power work among us and for us?"

Jan Richardson has said,

Hope is not always comforting or comfortable. Hope asks us to open ourselves to what we do not know, to pray for illumination in this life, to imagine what is beyond our imagining, to bear what seems unbearable. It calls us to keep breathing when beloved lives have left us, to turn toward one another when we might prefer to turn away. Hope draws our eyes and hearts toward a more whole future but propels us also into the present, where God waits for us to work toward a more whole world now.

What are you hoping for these days? Who helps us to hope when it is hard to hope? (Jan Richardson)

How do we live in the present moment as one already claimed by God's future. What do we need here and now in the midst of our present struggle to live

faithfully. (Sally Brown)

Hope is not always something we can fully grasp in the moment. Rebecca Solnit in her book Hope in the Dark gives many examples of how hope is manifested over time. We must not give up. One such example is some more recent positive changes that some indigenous peoples have experienced.

The Coast Miwok people were supposed to be extinct when I was growing up in their territory; in 1992 they began fighting for federal recognition, and in 2000 led by the gifted part-Miwok novelist Greg Sarris, they got it. In Yosemite National Park, the cradle of the concept of virgin nature, the native people who were wiped out of official representations - park signage, park histories, land-management policies - have in the past [two] decades reappeared in those contested cultural sites. And they've won the right to build their own cultural center in the park, a small victory for them but a big shift in defining what nature might mean and who will define it for the four million visitors each year. The Timbisha Shoshone, whose homeland became Death Valley National Park, have won far more. In 1994, they won federal recognition of their status as a tribe with unextinguished rights, and in 2000 they gained jurisdiction over nearly eight thousand acres in the park, as well as extensive lands outside the park.

She says, "This is how history is made, out of such unlikely materials, and of hope."

Slavery was at one time an accepted practice. No longer..... Even though in many places, we continue to fight for human rights for all peoples. And the fight is not over. Women's suffrage was hard fought. Women's rights are still on the table as more recognition of equal status continues to be fought. We are learning all the time about Children's true needs and standing up for their rights. We live in a world with greater fairness today, but we know that our work is not done.... We still HOPE that one day all people will share equally in the resources... that all will someday know the "Richness of God's glorious inheritance."

Hope is not about what we expect. It is an embrace of the essential

unknowability of the world, of the breaks with the present, the surprises. Our perhaps studying the record more carefully leads us to expect miracles - not when and where we expect them, but to expect to be astonished, to expect that we don't know. And this is grounds to act. I believe in hope as an act of defiance, or rather as the foundation for an ongoing series of acts of defiance, those acts necessary to bring about some of what we hope for and to live by principle in the meantime. There is no alternative, except surrender. And surrender abandons not only the future, it abandons the soul.....Hope means that change is all that is certain and that what we do matters. (Rebecca Solnit)

Vaclav Havel said from prison in 1986, "I understand above all that [hope is] a state of mind, not a state of the world... It is an orientation of the spirit, and orientation of the heart; it transcends the world that is immediately experienced, and is anchored somewhere beyond its horizons... [it involves] an ability to work for something because it is good [and right] and not just because it stands a chance to succeed."

Hope....there has been a flurry of interest in putting a woman on the 20 dollar bill. The woman that got the most votes is Harriet Tubman. Andrew Jackson is the man there now. When he died, he owned 150 slaves. Harriet Tubman, born a slave herself, helped to free at least 300 through the underground railroad system. Hope....against all odds.

Macrina Wiederkehr in *Seasons of Your Heart*

I was just thinking
one morning
during meditation
how much alike
hope
and baking powder are:

quietly
getting what is
best in me
to rise,
awakening
the hint of eternity
within.

I always think of that
when I eat biscuits now
and wish
that I could be
more faithful
to the hint of eternity,
the baking power
in me.

Paul's prayer for these Ephesian people of the Way [and for us], then, is that we might see clearly and understand fully the hope that is inherent in God's invitation to be part of God's family.... to take action for justice's sake.

I pray that the eyes of your heart will have enough light to see what is the hope of God's call, what is the richness of God's glorious inheritance..., 19 and what is the overwhelming greatness of God's power that is working among us... This power is conferred by the energy of God's powerful strength. 20 God's power at work in Christ [through us]

Today we ask God for enough light....we ask that our eyes and ears and hearts and spirits be open to experiencing and acting out of a faith in God's possibilities. We hold each other in hope.... and in so doing, we

Blessing of Hope
by Jan Richardson

So may we know
the hope
that is not just
for someday
but for this day
here, now,
in this moment
that opens to us
hope not made
of wishes
but of substance
hope made of sinew
and muscle
and bone
hope that has breath
and a beating heart
hope that will not
keep quiet
and be polite
hope that knows
how to holler
when it is called for
hope that knows
how to sing
when there seems
little cause
hope that raises us

from the dead
not someday
but this day,
every day,
again and
again and
again.

– Jan Richardson

<http://paintedprayerbook.com/>