

Sunday 3 May 2020

Ephesians 3:14-21

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family under 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, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Let us pray: We are absolutely blown away each time we seek to comprehend Your perfect all embracing love. To try to get a better understanding, we too often limit its reach, we try to determine who is worthy, and even try to proclaim a special closeness often created to include ourselves and those like us, but not others. Help us today as we struggle to wrap our heads around the breadth and length and height and depth of Your love. Expand our vision today. Amen.

“Vistas of Grace”

In my family the question was asked once in a while, “Who does Mommy love the most?” All four of us knew for sure that it was us. I was the oldest, and Mommy has loved me the longest so of course she has always favored me. My sister, knew that she was Mommy’s favorite, because she was cute and irresistible. My brother Bobby knew that Mommy loved him most because he was the nicest child you could ever know. And my baby brother Kevin knew for sure he was Mommy’s favorite because he was the baby and practice brings perfection. The truth is that my mother loved all of her children with all of her heart and still does after all these years with all of their trials and tribulations and a life time of prayers. As wonderful as mother’s love is, God’s love for everyone is far greater.

Everyday I have as one of my goals is to make sure that my wife knows that she is deeply loved by me. I try to keep her in mind all through the day and think of ways I can help her feel my deep love and appreciation. If she needs something, I will try to stop what I am doing and respond and try to help. As much as I love her, I am far from perfect and my actions are not as loving as I would hope. I have made her cry too many times. I have disappointed her in more ways than I know. As wonderful as I try to make my love for her be, God’s love for everyone is far greater.

How broad is God’s love for the world? It includes “every family under heaven”. God does not exclude anyone from his love. Every family is included. The human family, and each family of animal, bird, and insect. God’s eye is on the sparrow, because God’s love includes sparrows, and one does not fall to the ground that God does not care for. God includes families of plants in his love. You can see that love in the care that he has taken in even in wild flowers

that are here today and gone so quickly. This is one reason Christians are concerned about the environment and the care of creation. We do so because God does. And as we as Christians become perfected in our love it grows in breadth, including not just all people but everything in creation. We want to love as God loves.

How long is the love of God? How long will God love us? Is there a point where God will give up on any of us? God's love is eternal. God's love is without end. God's love is infinite. God loves us without limit, because God is love. It is impossible for God to do anything else and still be who God is. God will never stop loving us, no matter what we do, how we behave, what we say, what we believe. Because God loves us for the long haul, God is patient and continues to work with us, even when it is a struggle for us and for God.

We are God's children and those of us gifted to be parents know that no matter who much you love a child, some you may struggle with more than others. But you still love each child for who they are. You will work to develop a quick learner differently than you will with one who is a slow learner. But you will love them both deeply. You will work with a natural athlete differently than you will one who is uncoordinated and does not care for sports at all. But you will love them both deeply. You may find that some children are drawn to the drums and another to the recorder, or the piano, or have no musical interests at all. You will work with them differently, but that difference does not take away from your love. The differences in your children, instead of limiting your love, you seem to expand your love because of their uniqueness.

How high does God's love go for us? God loves us so much that there is no sacrifice too high for God to make for us. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. While we were still in rebellion God still loved us and claimed us as his own. God does not love some more than others. God has enough love to love everyone more than we deserve, and all that we desire. God cannot love us any less than God always will.

God's love is unmerited, there is no limiting factor to how much God loves us. If there is any limit to how high God's love for us will go, it is how much we are able to absorb. Some people are so bruised by the world that they no longer believe that they are loveable. This is often projected onto God which is so unfair to our loving God. We might believe that we are unlovable, but God never sees us in this way. We might see ourselves as a lost cause, but God will never leave our corner and will keep cheering us on.

We are sometimes the ones who diminish the love of God for others, by how we choose to judge them. At times we bear false witness against God's love for them, by saying God is angry with them when God is not, when we say that God rejects them, when God never will. What can separate anyone from the love of God we find in Christ Jesus? Nothing! So we should never imply that something can come between them and God. Not even sin. They may feel like they need to hide from God in the midst of the garden, but God is still seeking them and will continue to care for them even when they are struggling with the natural consequences of their sins.

God wants us to be good sibling in our treatment of others. Where they are struggling, we are to be supportive and patient with them. Where they are not seeing eye to eye with us, we need to take their questions seriously. Nothing should keep them from experiencing God's love through us. If God will never reject them, neither should we. God's love for them is that high.

God's love has depth to it that we cannot imagine. We are all deeply loved by God in every way imaginable. We can never hide from God. Wherever you are, God is there. In your

deepest depression, God is there. In the midst of your traumas, God is there. When you are confused and struggling to understand, God is there. God is not a fly by night lover. He never leaves us no matter what is going on in our lives, in our hearts or in our minds. God will never forsake us, even when in our anger and frustration, we yell for God to get out of our lives. God promises that even if we go down into the depths of hell, he will be there in hell with us and share our misery. So deeply are we loved by God.

There are times we look at people struggling with their lives and falsely accuse them of being out of God's care. We are so wrong. God never abandons his children, because he loves them, even those who do not see themselves as Christians yet.

Prevenient grace, is the loving care God gives too us, even before we are able to recognize that God is there to love back. This grace, this great godly love is working in every single life, not in just the lives of some, but in the lives of all. The hand of our loving God is shaping every life in their relationship God and others. For God this is often long, painstaking work. This work has been going on way before they were even born and continues on into eternity. This is how deep God's love is.

God wants us to not only grow in their knowledge of God's love, but God continues to help us gain assurance of salvation, and a desire to grow in our love so we can love as God loves. As the Holy Spirit encourages us to question what we believe and what we think we know, God lovingly helps us as we seek out our answers that will feed our souls.

God loves you. God has always loved you. God will always love you and nothing can take that gift from you. God is just waiting for you to embrace as much love as you can. So may you grow in grace, in your love for God and in your learning to reflect that love to all the lives around you, especially to those who have yet to believe.

Let us pray: Thank you for your love that is beyond what we can ask or imagine.
Help us to grow in this love and enable us to love others with that same great love. We ask this in Christ name, surrounded by his love. Amen.

All are invited to our love feast, because all are loved as they are by God.
We feed together on more than just bread,
but are nourished by the fellowship we enjoy around the table of God.
We drink together on more than just beverage,
but find our thirst quenched by the grace that flows to those who gather around the table of God.

Let us pray: God of love and grace, allow us to feel your presence among us.
Help us to feel a sense of community.
Give us a richer assurance of your love.
Open our hearts to love as generously as you.
Let loose within our hearts as sense of communal joy.
Let us be present as you are present with us now,
As we pray in the words of the Jesus saying:
Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, they will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses and we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.

Romans 8:31-39

What then are we to say about these things?

If God is for us, who is against us?

He who did not withhold his own son,

but gave him up for all of us,

will he not with him also give us everything else?

Who can bring a charge against God's elect?

It is God who justifies.

Who is to condemn?

It is Christ Jesus who died, yes, who was raised,

who is at the right hand of God,

who indeed intercedes for us.

Who will separate us from the love of Christ?

Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine,

or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

As it is written,

"For your sake we are being killed all day long;

we are accounted as sheep to the slaughter."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors

through him who loved us. For I am convinced that

neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, not things

present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor heights,

nor depths, nor anything else in all creation, will be able

to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Be present at our table Lord;

be here and everywhere adored;

thy creatures bless and grant that we

may feast in paradise with thee. Amen.

Now as we share together our bread,

let us be thankful for the love of God

that envelops all of us at this moment.

Let us eat and be thankful.

Now as we share together our beverage,

let us be thankful for the fellowship we share

with another as Valley Forge United Methodist Church.

Let us drink and be thankful.

Lord bless us now as we go our separate ways,
knowing that we are always together in you.
Bless us with your love,
the eternal love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
that refreshes us, strengthens us, and fills us with peace.
Amen.

Don't forget to send in your tithes and offerings,
they are always much appreciated and helpful.

Don't forget Wednesday Bible study
found here on our face book page.
If you have not looked at this past weeks study
you can do it now.

Keep well. Keep safe. Be blessed. Amen.