

**Sermon for Proper 12B – July 29, 2018**  
**Church of Reconciliation, San Antonio**  
**The Rev. Judith L. Rhodes**

*For The Love of God, Indeed!*

If you grew up in an Irish family, or spent any time with members of an Irish family then no doubt you heard the words issuing forth from someone's mouth at one time or another:

*For the love of God...*

Well, in my family, I often heard it said, "For the love of God, Judy..." and I give you permission to finish the sentence any way that would amuse you.

*For the love of God, indeed.* It's what St. Paul's text from his letter to the Ephesians we read and hear this day, is truly all about...

*For this reason, I bow my head 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, God may grant that you be strengthened in your inner being with power through the Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.*

My friends, this week I sure needed to hear the blessed assurance of those words of St. Paul as he wrote to the church in Ephesus. It is the message the whole world needs to hear and take to heart this very moment in time- to be reminded that each and every one of us, in our families of origin, dysfunctional as they can be, take our names from the one Creator who gifted us each with life. *For the love of God...*

This good news is possibly the BEST news we can hear at this time. St. Paul invites us to look beyond ourselves, our families of origin, and embrace an expansive and inclusive truth that not one creature of the Divine's imagination is not in some way related to us all. And you know, if we take that as gospel truth, and we should, then there can be no throw-away's, no least of these, no aliens of no accord, no nobodies... that we are not brother or sister of, in Christ.

The news is so full of tragedy, violence, and death these days with news contrasted by first responders who risk their lives running toward the danger in order to serve those they have sworn their lives to protect. My heart broke this week as I heard the stories of nearly whole families lost on board the duck boat in Missouri, or witnessed the video of the man shot in front of his five year old son in Florida, or listened to the too often heard sounds of ammo being discharged in the horrific attack in Toronto on a beautiful summer's evening.

This text is really St. Paul's prayer not only for Ephesus but for us, the church in this time. His intercession on our behalf is that we may be strengthened with the power of the Holy Spirit, that as Christ dwells in our hearts through faith, we trust that we are rooted and grounded in love.

These words of prayer from St. Paul are also echoed in the Eucharistic Prayer we are using this entire summer...

*Deliver us from the presumption of coming to this Table for solace only and not for strength; for pardon only, and not for renewal. Let the grace of this Holy Communion make us one body, one spirit in Christ that we may worthily serve the world in his name.*

To which we reply,

*Risen Lord, be known to us in the breaking of the bread.*

I ask you to pay close attention to the words you are praying with me in our Eucharistic prayer.

We are warned against presumptuous belief that all we need is solace, to personally feel relieved from any burden or fear. Rather, we are instructed in this prayer to come to this table not only for solace but also for strength so that as we leave this feast nourished by the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, we are stronger in our faith and in our commitment to serve all others we meet along the way.

We are even warned against presumptuous belief that all we need is pardon for our sins, for things done and left undone, for the evil we have done and the evil done on our behalf. No, not even asking for God's pardon is sufficient! instead we are instructed to ask for renewal... the grace of renewed action on behalf of justice and peace, renewed witness on behalf of the Divine's expansive and inclusive love. Only that is sufficient.

One of the greatest challenges of living a faithful Christian life is appropriating the theological truths we celebrate and pray in our liturgies. It's one thing to sing triumphant hymns and thrill with the crowds in the great occasions of Easter and Pentecost. It's another thing entirely to "bring it home," to not only embrace the promise of resurrection power but to also boldly exemplify it through word *and* deed in the ordinariness of every day living.

Christianity and its emissaries often dwell upon the weakness and frailty of our human nature. Sadly, we fail to adequately grasp the paradox of our own time: that behind the displays of ostentatious power, greed, ability and prowess with which we are surrounded, there lies a profound, even abysmal poverty of self-esteem- an abyss at the very heart of us that we vainly attempt to fill with work, possessions, accomplishments, and commodities. That insatiable void – that hole in our very soul- is made of our inability to believe the truth about ourselves, the beautiful truth that we are each made in the very image and likeness of God and that God loves us beyond anything we can imagine possible.

St. Paul puts it right out front for us today as clearly as he ever speaks...

*I pray that you may have the power to comprehend with all the saints, what is the breadth and length, height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God... to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine... in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

Wow!! Did you listen to Paul's prayer, my friends? Are you breathless and in awe at the power of the truth contained in his prayer? If not, go

back and re-read this prayer from Ephesians this week every day, as many times a day, until you are breathless at its power and in awe of the magnitude of its truth.

And what is its truth? Nelson Mandela rephrases it in his 1994 inaugural speech:

*Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that frightens us most. We ask ourselves, "Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and famous?" Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that people won't feel insecure around you. We were born to manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in all of us. And when we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.*

My friends in Christ, power is not sinful. Power employed for the common good, power with and exercised on behalf of others is what St. Paul is referencing in this text before us today. The power over others to benefit only self, only ones like us, only ones who look like us, think like us, love like us, believe like us, speak like us, act like us... that's the kind of evil that is so insidious and so destructive of all God intends for all God's creatures. That self-serving, idolatrous, power is sin. And even as polite as we Episcopalians fashion ourselves to be, there is no denying the evil of self-serving power.

St. Paul prays that we are liberated from the fear that we are not adequate, not powerful enough to make a difference... St. Paul's prayer is that we comprehend the promise which is our power unleashed in Love. In the face of the power of Love, even death itself is vanquished.

We are made in the image and likeness of our Creator to unleash the power of Love in all that we do, all that we say, all that we think, all that we become... *that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are rooted and grounded in love.*

So, in the days to come, when you and I are feeling inadequate, powerless, despairing, hopeless, fearful, faithless... and there will be those days, perhaps the prayer we should pray is this one from Macrina Wiederkehr (quoted in *A Grateful Heart*)

*O God, please help me to believe the truth about myself  
no matter how beautiful it is!*

Maybe from that place of being breathless and in awe of the truth of this prayer, you and I will risk loving more and more and more... becoming like the One we receive from this sacred table... leaving this place to accomplish in Love far more than we can ask for or imagine possible.

My prayer is this:

*O God, please help us to believe the truth about ourselves  
no matter how beautiful it is!*

***For the love of God, indeed!***

Amen.