

Ephesians 3:14-21

Unknown Unknowns

"Human intelligence: have we reached the limit of knowledge?" This was the title of an article from the online journal *The Conversation* published October 11, 2019. In the article author Maarten Boudry explores whether or not human beings are reaching the limits of knowledge. It is an interesting and thought provoking read. One paragraph that caught my attention made the following reference,

In one of his infamous memorandum notes on Iraq, former US secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld, makes a distinction between two forms of ignorance: the "known unknowns" and "unknown unknowns". In the first category belong the things that we know we don't know. We can frame the right questions, but we haven't found the answers yet. And then there are the things that "we don't know we don't know". For these unknown unknowns, we can't even frame the questions yet.¹

Going to the scripture reading from Ephesians there is the line that prays that we would know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. Maybe this is one of those unknown unknowns. It doesn't mean things will not be revealed to us, it just means that there will likely always be the love of Christ that surpasses our knowledge and yet fills us with all the fullness of God.

Let's back up for a moment to the opening line of the reading. "For this reason," Those are the words which begin this scripture reading, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name." It might be good for us to review the "for this reason" part as it refers to things that have already been shared by the writer of the letter.

Though there is evidence that this letter was not written by the Apostle Paul, it uses Paul's name to give credibility to its content. This was not unusual in ancient letter writing and in no way makes it any less important for edification, so I am going to use Paul's name as the writer did.

At least some of the reason Paul bows his knees before the Father is because of what Paul has seen God doing through Jesus and in God's people. The letter began with spiritual blessings we have received through Christ, noting that because of Jesus we live in the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us. This was also a time when there was separation between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Paul called it a dividing wall that

¹ Boudry, Maarten. <https://theconversation.com/human-intelligence-have-we-reached-the-limit-of-knowledge-124819>. Accessed July 31, 2021.

Jesus had broken down, destroying barriers making the distinctions valid no longer as we are all, then and now, one body in Christ. He bowed his “knees before the Father in reverence, in awe, in adoration, and submission to God from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name”. Paul had witnessed the powerful, amazing, grace-filled love with which God worked in and through people because of Christ and the creative and sustaining power of the Holy Spirit.

From all that Paul has experienced and witnessed he comes before God in prayer for those who read and hear the letter. It is a prayer that I have for the congregations and people I minister to and with, beyond our city and in our city. It is a prayer for our denomination, the Presbyterian Church in Canada, as we set a path for reconciliation in many areas, and it is a prayer for the whole Christian church.

Just reading these words of scripture would be sufficient enough, without need to expound on what is presented, as one savors and ponders phrases like “rooted and grounded in love” and “power to comprehend with 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.” Still, there is value in plumbing the depth of at least some of the richness of the prayer.

Paul writes, “I pray that, according to the riches of God’s 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 am not sure how one comprehends the riches of God’s glory; it may well fit into the unknown unknowns category. It is not that we haven’t glimpsed God’s glory in creation or in science, but we don’t even know what we don’t know about God’s glory, so to comprehend the expanse of that glory is beyond us. What can be known is that we get to experience some of God’s glory and that the rest is far greater than our imaginations.

The part about being strengthened in our inner being with the power through his Spirit, that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith, that too leads to some interesting places. In reading a commentary by Karen Chakoian she offered the following picture of what it might look like and mean to have Christ dwell in one’s heart. She writes,

The issue is letting Christ in to change us. Having Christ dwell in our hearts is akin to having a new person move into your household. If they’re just visiting, it is all rather easy; you simply offer hospitality and try to practice good manners. But if someone moves into stay, everything changes. At first you might try to hold on to your familiar patterns and routines, and the new member may work hard to accommodate you and stay out of the way. But eventually they make their mark. Conversations change. Relationships realign. Household tasks increase and

responsibilities shift. So it is when Christ moves in to the hearts of Christians. This isn't merely tweaking old patterns; everything changes.²

Everything changes when Christ moves into the hearts of Christians. If you are not changing, then this may be an opportunity to reflect on whether or not Jesus is a guest in your heart or has been invited fully into your heart. Being a Christian means that change will happen, it will be inevitable, it will also be life-giving and an adventure. It will not take away hardship or pain, but it will give you a new lens of faith with which to live into what every you face and accept or take the steps toward change that is rooted and grounded in the love of God for you and all people.

Paul continues, "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."

As in science, it is not that we stop asking questions and be satisfied with not knowing the unknowns. In fact, the prayer is that we may have the power to comprehend what is the breadth and length and height and depth of love, knowledge, and fullness of God. We can ask questions, we can study, we can wonder, ponder, and reflect, and in that we will come to know God more fully. But it is also true that there are mysteries and questions of faith that will allude us just as there are questions known and unknown that science is asking or yet to ask.

The prayer ends with a doxology, an expression of praise to 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 generation, for ever and ever."

What if we actually started to believe that there is a power at work within us, not just as individuals, but as the church, that is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine? How would that affect the way we worship and work? Come October this congregation of St. Andrew's is going to be asking those questions. We are headed into a year long work and celebration of discernment as we consider how God's power is at work in our congregation. Seeking to learn what God may be able to accomplish in us. Trusting that it is abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine. It is a conversation for every church to have. It is a conversation for you to have with God.

What I do know is that when Christ dwells in our hearts, and we let that power work within us, amazing adventures start. Life changes and you have to be open to that. Letting Christ have full reign over the house, not just an invite to couch surf, allows the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge and the power at work within us that is able to

² Chakoian, Karen. *Feasting on the Word: Year B Volume 3 Pentecost and Season after Pentecost*. Editors David L. Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2010. P280.

accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine not only in our generation but for generations to come, it allows that power to get to work and blow our minds while filling our hearts and lives. Thanks be to God!