

Ephesians 1:15-23

The Power to Love

It is getting harder each week to write a message for Sunday worship as the pain of Indigenous people across our nation is witnessed almost daily in a newsclip or video shared on social media platforms. This week it felt like in writing more care than usual was going to be necessary given the language of the scripture reading in which the church, which is the body of Christ, is promised the immeasurable greatness of God's power for those who believe.

Whether it's residential schools, racism, marginalization, or harm to LGBTQI+ persons, the church world wide has times of finding itself having to reconsider the actions that have been taken often in partnership with government. All this is puzzling as Jesus died because of the actions of those in power. Our faith is based in the love of God who sent his Son so that all might have life and have it abundantly.

So it is with humility that we come to this scripture trusting that there is a life giving message in the text. Context being important, one needs to remember that the early church did not have power, it was struggling, often persecuted, and was mostly made up of people from the margins of society. The words are written to people in need of a message of hope and promise. The writer begins this portion of the letter with a prayer that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give a spirit of wisdom and revelation as people come to know him, so that with the eyes of the heart enlightened, people may know what is the hope to which God has called them.

The sentence in the scripture is not complete yet, it breathlessly goes on, but let's stop and take a look at just this part. The first thing that is asked is for a spirit of wisdom and revelation to be given so that we can come to know Jesus, the one who willingly became flesh and blood, lived in the challenges of being human, died an inhuman death, all for the sake of the possibility of human beings having a relationship with their loving God.

This action on the part of God was not taken for just a few people, it was for every person who has, is, and will be living on the land of the earth, it was action taken for all time with the hope that we would come to know, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the wisdom and revelation needed to be in relationship with God and to live well with one another. There is a hope to which God has called us. It is about richness of life which is the glorious inheritance that is given to those who would believe. It is about the immeasurable greatness of God's power for those who believe according to the working of God's great power that was put to work in Christ when God raised him from the dead and seated Jesus at his right hand.

This is not about human power. It is about the power of God to change lives, to change relationships between us and God and between us and those we care about. Just as important is the power of God working in us to bring about a change in relationship between those who have been greatly harmed by oppressive policies and decisions, whether they happened a day ago or a hundred years ago. We are given power as the church to witness to the presence of Christ in the world...Christ who offered peace, grace, hope, joy, and love in the face of adversity, enemies, harm, and even death.

For Christians, it was God's immeasurable great power that went to work in bringing Jesus from the depths of death to the heights of heaven, to a place that is far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. In other words, Jesus' power and authority is all encompassing.

This power is not just about governments and earthly authority, it is about authority over our personal decisions and the work of the church. And I will say it over and over again, how we live and witness to Jesus in the world is not about our power unless it is the power to forgive, to love, to heal, to bring hope and speak loudly for justice in a very broken world, one in which the church and individuals who consider themselves Christians have made excruciatingly bad choices.

This scripture is about Jesus' presence in the world and beyond the world, it is about Jesus being the head of the church and the people the body and never should the body think it has become the head. The church is the body that reveals the fullness of Christ who fills all in all.

How we witness to the world as Christians has brought to mind through the discussion of this passage a poem that is attributed to St. Teresa of Avila. I have used it before in worship, but it is powerful and so for those who may find it a valuable reminder of how we are to show power in the world I share these words...

Christ has no body but yours,

No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,

Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.

Christ has no body now but yours,

No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

This scripture from Ephesians is an invitation to know you have access to the loving, forgiving, hope filled power of God. It is there for you personally; it is there for the church and it is for the world.

One practice I have had over the years is to replace “you” in the scripture with the name of a person that may be in need of God’s power through Christ in their lives. Often I have used my own name so that I claim the power of God in my life. In light of what is happening in Canada and in the Presbyterian Church in Canada, for me, the name of our congregation or other congregations will find a way into this scripture that is a prayer for the eyes of the heart to be enlightened through the spirit of wisdom and revelation as we come to know our loving God who gave his precious Son for the world. To show you what is meant, the prayer would go something like this...

I do not cease to give thanks for St. Andrew’s as I remember the church in my prayers. I pray that the God of our lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give the congregation a spirit of wisdom and revelation as we come to know God, so that with the eyes of our heart enlightened, we may know what is the hope to which God has called us, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of God’s power for us, this congregation, who believe...

I hope you get the gist of what can be done with this scripture that melds the prayer for us today with the words of power to bring about restored relationships in families, in communities, and in this country.

Our power is the power of Christ who loves – period. If by our actions we are bringing harm then we do not love as Christ loved. Jesus’ life was lived for all. Jesus’ death was one death for all. Jesus’ reign is the power of God accessible to each of us and to the church to heal.

May the grace and peace of God our Creator and the Lord Jesus Christ be our wisdom, our guide, our hope. Amen.