

## Ephesian 3:14-21

### **My Response to God**

It is a regular occurrence on the streets of cities and our city is no different. A 911 call comes in and police, paramedics, the fire department or all three at once are dispatched into the community to deal with every thing from overdoses, to domestic violence, gun threats, fire and so much more. I am sure that I cannot comprehend the ways in which first responders use their knowledge and gifts to respond to the needs of others. These people give of themselves. It is no wonder that there is a need for stress leave and/or various other programs for people in these vocations who care for the community in ways we can only imagine.

That is what prayer is like for many of us. It is our 911 call to God. We are in a jam or find ourselves in situations that we cannot deal with either because we have made poor decisions or life has just brought us to our knees and so the only thing we think to do is to pray. This can happen with people who believe that there is a God and even with those who are just hedging their bets as they don't see any solution or way out.

It is okay if that is how you come to pray, but know that it does not have to be the only time you pray or the only way to pray.

As someone who is in ministry, I find that when I go to someone's home and a meal is served or even in the church when there is a meeting or a meal, everyone looks to me for the blessing. Thing is that all of us are equipped to pray. Prayer is just us speaking from our hearts, giving thanks, asking for help, or swearing profusely at God because we feel so alone and devastated. It is all prayer. The Book of Psalms is filled with all kinds of prayers spoken by people in all kinds of situations from giving thanks, to being so mad that they tell God to smash babies against a rock. (Psalm 137:9). Now that is flippin' mad! Thing is God can handle any type of prayer, because prayer is just us talking to, with, or at God. God is big enough to deal with your emotions.

In the scripture from Ephesians, we have this wonderful prayer. Paul says that it is his response to get down on his knees before the Father, this magnificent Father who parcels out all heaven and earth. This prayer is his response to God based in all that Paul had written so far in this letter to the church at Ephesus. This is a letter about God being God for all people not just for the Jewish people and not just for the gentiles, which is the rest of the world. God is God for everyone and because of that we are to find ways to be united. United in love, generosity, justice, compassion and more.

In a time when the news and global politics in particular appear to only be filled with reasons for division, God call us to unity in Christ. Whether or not you believe in God or

follow Christ, the message of compassion, justice, love, and working for the good of all that is the Christian message is a compelling one. A message where there is equality and equity. Where my need is not more important than my neighbours'.

And Paul can speak to this from a place of change. Paul, once Saul, was a persecutor of Christians. As a Christian, to see Saul was to see death. As a Pharisee he saw himself as one with the true answers about God and was going to do what it took to get rid of those who were followers of Jesus. Then he has a spiritual experience, one that completely changes his way of being... of living. The persecutor became the persecuted. In fact, Paul was writing this letter from jail, there because of his beliefs and teaching others about Jesus.

Even under those circumstances he says, "My response is to get down on my knees before the Father this magnificent Father who parcels out all heaven and earth." Paul continues, "I ask God to strengthen you by his Spirit – not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength – that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in." And then more yet, "And I ask God, that with both feet planted firmly on love, you'll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God."

What a prayer! It is written for all. It is primarily written for community for the benefit of community. The "you" you hear in this is a plural you, more like y'all. It is not that the prayer cannot or should not be accessible for the individual, but to only consider it in that light takes away the full power of the prayer. This is about being people of God, whether you are a skeptic or a full on, no doubt in your mind, kind of Christian.

And Paul does not stop with those words, but continues with, "God can do anything, you know – far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams!" So often I have said that if God fits in a box, then that is not God at all. God is so much bigger than our imagination. Is capable of so much more than we could come up with in our wildest dreams. And yet God does not do it in a pushing way, but rather by working in and through us. As Eugene Peterson writes in *The Message*, God Spirit works within us...deeply and gently within us.

If there is something going on in your life that needs prayer, I encourage you to use this prayer for your life or the lives of those you love. Every time you see the word "you" replace the "you" with your name or the name of someone you want to prayer for. This is deeply powerful.

But remember, also and importantly, this is a prayer for community. Here at St. Andrew's we have a lot going on. We are working at what our ministry will be and how God is shaping us and this church for the wider work of sharing love, compassion, hope, justice and more in community, whether that be our city or more broadly in the world. I believe Paul's prayer can be a prayer that we use to determine what it is that God is up to in our midst. And that will take all of us praying. The one thing we can use more of is

prayer so that whatever goes on here will be deeply held in prayer, will be covered in prayer, bathed in prayer.

Let me share the words that Paul wrote once again, think of the church, this church or the church more broadly. Do not think that your imagination or wildest dreams can come close to what God could be or is up to in our midst, with others, and in community. Only pray and trust that God will answer, that this magnificent Creator, who parcels out all heaven and earth will strengthen us by the Holy Spirit – not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength – that Christ will live in us as we open the door and invite Christ in. And with both feet planted firmly on love, we will be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love.

Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God knowing that God can do anything – far more than we could ever imagine or guess or request in our wildest dreams, doing it by working within us, the Holy Spirit deeply and gently within us. Respond to all of life, respond to God in your life, no matter how much you trust God, respond with prayer.

In Christ, with Christ and through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.