

The Rev. Jennifer Adams
Sermon preached at Grace, Holland on July 26, 2009
“Praying our Way”

From Ephesians this morning we heard these words, “I pray that . . . God 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.” There’s something incredibly beautiful about that prayer, and there’s more. . . . “I pray that you may comprehend . . . the breadth and length and height and depth, to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” This isn’t the author praying for his own strength or making sure that the community gets some particular point; it isn’t him arguing a theological angle as is often the case or even teaching or telling a story from his own experience. There isn’t history to remember in these verses or ecclesiology for us to unpack as there often is in the epistles. These verses are just a very basic statement of the author’s hope for the community at Ephesus and other places too. Delivered in a beautiful prayer is his hope for them: that they may be strengthened in their inner being through the Spirit’s power. That they may know the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ’s love. And that they may be filled with the fullness of God. It’s just a simple, heartfelt prayer for the other. And it is gift. And so I wonder as I hear these words what if we made something like this our primary motivation, or our mission or even simply our intent as individuals and as community of faith.

What if we began every encounter with that simple prayer as our purpose. What if that prayer were the point of every program, the source of every service, the reason for every relationship? So that as we shook hands at coffee hour we’d be consciously hoping for that other to be strengthened in their inner being through the power of the Spirit. And while we went about serving food every Wednesday at community kitchen, our motivation would be that everyone there would know the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ’s love. And as we sat in the various circles in which we sit in this place, discussing books or convention decisions or the issues of the day our goal would be to help one another, and the others beyond us to be filled with the fullness of God.

I think it would change things. And it would change us inside first. Because while this might be presumptuous, I don't think that most of us are as intentional about this as we could be. Certainly none of us would ever deny this prayer, but I don't how many of us live it as a conscience way of approaching the world every day. When I still myself and reground myself I know the hope in this prayer lives in me, and I truly do want these things for the "others" I encounter, but it's tough to hang on to this focus day to day, minute to minute. As life's details and demands fill my hours and my mind, my motivations maybe yours too? Tend to lose their grounding, their prayerfulness. Which doesn't mean that I go and do terrible things, but my focus gets a little off. And it stays off. For any of us our days can easily become more about getting things done then helping others be whole. Our time can be spent "checking things off" more filling with God. My goals (maybe yours too?) can even occasionally come to be shaped more by the breadth and length of my schedule than the breadth and length of the love of Christ. And so I know that I and maybe some of you too, need this prayer.

And what would happen if we let it seep not only into this place but out of this place too and into our everyday lives? What if when we were driving and things got a little tense, we prayed for the person on our tail to know the love of Christ? [It sounds funny because it's never the first thing to go through our minds (at least my mind) but what if it were?] Or what if when we were in line at the grocery store and things got very, very slow, what if we'd pray for those three people who were very slowly unloading their carts ahead of us to know Christ's love? I think it can happen! What if at home our goal was simply, primarily, first above all things to be grounded in love. And what if work was a place where we were presented with opportunity after opportunity to help others be filled with the fullness of God?

I think it would change things. It would change us. And I think it's worth a try. It won't be the same kind of amazingly, immediately and obviously world changing miracle as multiplying the loaves and fish was, but it might be a slowly changing the world sort of miracle that opens us up to share the loaves and fish we've been given. I think it might just have that kind of power in our hearts and our actions too. So here's my challenge: Let's try it for a week, just a week and during that week we'll take it one day at a time, one hour at a time, one encounter at a time. And if we miss a moment along the way we'll ask for forgiveness and begin again with that prayer

and keep on. And we'll start just by praying it over and over again, here. We'll start by praying it for the person next to us or in front of us or behind us, or for the first person we meet as we leave this place whoever that is. Know that we are praying it for you too, every step of the way: "I pray that God 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 power to comprehend what is the breadth and length and height and depth, to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."