

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI
THE WORSHIP OF GOD • SEPTEMBER 1, 2019
“BONDING TO BECOME MORE”

Litany

Based on Psalm 81

Sing aloud to God and shout for joy!

Raise a song, sound the tambourine, the sweet lyre with the harp.

“I will answer you in the secret place of thunder.”

“I will feed you with the finest wheat, with honey from the rock!”

The Scripture

Ephesians 3:18:21

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. 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 generations, forever and ever. Amen.

The Message

Far More than We Can Ask or Imagine

Nick Larson

Have you ever had one of those moments, where you just didn't have the words?

Now I know this might be hard for some of you to believe, but I have those moments, too. But you're right; that usually doesn't stop me from trying to use lots of words, throwing them at the wall hoping like crazy that the other person can catch some that stick.

In fact, sometime ask me about how I got into this whole crazy calling of being a pastor. I'll tell you about how words failed me and pushed me right into this passion.

Have you ever tried to describe something so vital that words themselves don't ever seem to do it justice? We try, of course, because words are all we have in life, but even when you do share good ones, ones close to what you know. They always seem to be missing something, right?

I had one of those conversations this week in Lakota Coffee. I was sharing about something that I have always struggled to put into words. With a hot latte in my hand, and an eager listener in my friend across the table, I saw myself trying to share something so important and foundational to my understanding of the way the world works and the make-up of the very fabric of our universe. Yet, even with her affirming nods, something felt missing. After trying through talking for a while, we agreed together that what we were trying to do was describe something indescribable. We acknowledged together, that often, probably too often, there are things in life that one can only attempt to describe, and then you have to just leave it there hoping the other might comprehend.

This is what's happening in Ephesians, Chapter 3. We'll get back to that in just a moment. First, some context. Right here, the Apostle Paul, or perhaps one of his students, is providing us, the reader, a hinge between the first three chapters of this letter and the last three chapters.

In the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul is describing for us what God has done by gathering up all created things into a new united humanity in Christ. That God is constantly at work breaking down the dividing walls of hostility and creating something more out of all of creation. This is what we've been talking about this month, in how with God there is always more.

The last three chapters of Ephesians is where Paul is instructing readers about what they are to do in response to what God has already done. Ephesians says that true discipleship comes when we live like God has already made peace between God and those previously estranged from God, as well as peace between those who have been previously hostile to one another. The writer here believes that this truth, which may be beyond comprehension, is that God is constantly reconciling all things to Godself. And Paul's prayer for the infant church in Ephesus is that they may have the power to comprehend the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

"Revelation," according to H. Richard Niebuhr, "means the moment in our history through which we know ourselves to be known from the beginning to end, in which we are apprehended by the knower; it means the self-disclosing of that eternal knower."

This is the power Paul is praying for them to have, that they might know the revelation of Christ's love for them. For it is in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for.

Long before we even heard of Jesus or got our hopes up, most knew there was more to this life than what words alone could describe. The mystery is that people who have never heard of Christ and those who have heard of him all their lives stand on the same ground before God. They get the same offer, same help, same promises, in

Jesus Christ. The same message is accessible and welcoming to everyone, across the board.

That takes me back to that coffee shop moment this week. What do you do when words can't describe the indescribable, but you know that experience?

We ended up talking about the idea of what it felt like. You end up trying to share your experience, attempting to let another person into that moment in time. In our conversation, we shared about what it was like listening to the unfiltered wind on a mountain top when you are above the tree line or that experience of the warmth of the morning sun on your face when your toes are buried in a sandy beach.

This passage, this plea, from the author is saying that the Love of Christ surpasses knowledge; it is bigger, wider, longer, higher, and deeper than anything we can ask or imagine. That brings us back to it always being about more.

And yes, as much as it might feel odd to hear, even this minister, this professional thinker for Jesus, someone who has written and preached thousands of words about the love of Christ, still struggles to adequately describe it. The experiential love of Christ is the one thing that I know is very real and yet is beyond our conventional means of analysis and description. It was the one thing I was trying to tell my friend about this week in Lakota Coffee. It is my experience of the revelation of Christ's love for me.

And so, this passage speaks to me, because here, in Scripture, there is this entire letter that is in essence, saying, "I know right!" What God has done, and is doing, and is offering to each one of us, it is bigger than knowledge. It's hard to comprehend!

Not because it's hard to summarize, but because by its very nature, words will always fall short. You can't use words. Well you must, but ultimately, they won't do it.

Rob Bell, in his book *What We Talk about When We Talk about God*, tells us that the Germans, interestingly enough, have a word for this: they call it *grenz-be-griff-lich*. (I'm sorry because I don't speak German.) This describes "that which is very real but is beyond analysis. I'm talking about that intuitive sense that reality at its deepest flows from God who is *grenzbegrifflich*."

Yet, you don't need a complex German word to understand this, because you already know it. You already know that there aren't enough words in the English language to describe the satisfaction felt in holding your child for the first time. There aren't enough ways to describe the potent beauty of a sunset.

There's an ancient story about a man named Jacob who had a magnificent dream, and when he wakes up he says, "Surely, God was in this place, and I, I wasn't aware of it."

Until now.

That is the power of the love of Christ once you've experienced it; you know something you didn't know before. Once you're awake to it, once you see it, that this God is beyond all concepts or attempts to reign in the divine.

Then you'll do just about anything to seek it out again and again. That is my hope and challenge for you.

At Lakota, my friend and I talked about how she seeks it in long runs. I seek it on cliff faces, and how we have both spend grueling hours hiking up mountains hoping to find it at the top. I was trying to tell her this week about how I've encountered that very same thing on the other side of silence and solitude. Those of you who have learned the rich tradition of Centering Prayer, you probably an idea of what I mean, and if you don't you might ask Robin Perso, he'll teach you.

But you don't have to do any of that. You don't need to be an endurance runner, or a rock climber, or stand on top of 14,000 foot mountains. You have already done the work today, because you're here.

The love of Christ that is reconciling all things, the power at work within us that is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, will be offered to you in this place.

We as Big D Disciples practice it every week. Yes, Communion, the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper. The table of grace. That's the essence of this table. That's why it stands at the very center of our worship. It is the most tangible and inclusive, bigger circle drawing thing I can share with you.

We as human beings have evolved seeking social connection with one another, we strive after meaning. The very purpose in life is for you to experience the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, the very fullness of God. And not to overstate it, but simply, you can find it here, at this every extending table of Grace offered by our redeemer.

God's first act, Jurgen Moltmann, says was not a big flashy display of power. But rather, it is a divine withdrawal. God made room and space for creation, so consequently creation is characterized, to a large extent, by God's absence. We know this because of the ache we each encounter in the world, the brokenness.

God's second act was a re-entry into creation. God moved back towards creation. This was the Spirit hovering over the formlessness left behind in the wake of God's

withdrawal. God's re-entry is characterized by the insertion of order, beauty and goodness into chaos. Creation, as described by the ancient poetry of Genesis is the Spirit of God, the Christ, re-introducing order and goodness.

God's action then is nurturing, nourishing, and loving that brings about goodness out of chaos. God is that force that nurtures, loves, and nourishes you in in all times and places. That is this table.

It is available to you in those moments, which you struggle to fully describe, like laying on a dock late at night looking up into the stars hearing the holy whisper that you are beloved. It is in those moments, of staring out upon the very beauty of the world, being struck by the simple sound of the wind that doesn't have leaves by which to be heard. It is those moments, where you stand and hand a bowl of soup to a person in a desperate circumstance and they whisper thank you, and you feel like you should be the one thanking them.

It feels like that moment when you mind clears in the midst of a long run, where the repetition of your feet rising and falling again and again can free you from all the ache of this world. It is what it feels like to lay on the beach with the warm sun on your face and the cool sand between your toes, knowing that this is what heaven must feel like, because in some tangible and yet intangible way it does.

The drama of the biblical story, and all of life, is the story of God's constant movement towards us. God re-enters the world from the bottom up, in the midst of the least of these, both in people and in moments. God draws larger and larger circles, extending a broad welcome.

God is drawing a bigger circle around you. God's grace is extending itself to you, in this very moment, in this very hour, in this very service. God is inviting you to receive the transformative experience of welcome and understanding.

You see, God doesn't enter the world in words, but in moments, not in stuff, but in experiences. Of course, within those moments there is stuff, but it is not the stuff that gives it meaning.

I can't tell you what shirt I was wearing the day I drove my kids home from the hospital, or what car we drove. But if I had a picture of me that day, then I would value that shirt or car because of how it connects me to that moment.

God offers you the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, in the common elements of bread and cup. God invites you to join Christ in the reconciliation of all things, starting with us and Christ, right here at this table.

The writer concludes his letter to the Ephesians by saying this: *Put to use every tool you're given. Be prepared, because you are up against far more than you can handle on your own. Take all the help you can get, every tool God has issued, so that when it's all over but the shouting you'll still be on your feet. Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and salvation are more than words. Learn how to live them. You'll need them. Keep your eyes open for God, keep each other spirits up, so that no one feels left out or alone.*

That my friends, is the power at work within us, by which God can accomplish far more than all we can ask or imagine.

So, come to this table, today, as a reminder, as a promise, as an offer, that you don't do any of this alone. First and foremost, you do this crazy thing we call life with Christ, and also with all who choose to gather at this table.

Amen?

Amen.