

Jun 12/22 (Leaders' Guide) Ephesians 3:14-21 "Worship: Living into the life of the Trinity"

In the sermon Tim described the Jewish temple. Everywhere you looked signs and symbols cried out – no access, no entry, trespassers will be prosecuted. Divisions were cemented and given spiritual significance, divisions between priest / commoner, Jew / Gentile, man / woman. In the first three chapters of Ephesians Paul, with this picture in the background has been reveling in what Jesus has done. For in Jesus we have access to the living God. In Jesus all the dividing walls are torn down so that all equally have access to the living God. Not only do we have access, but we are the temple of the living God. In light of this reality Paul drops to his knees in prayer...

Read Ephesians 3:14-21; John 17:1-5, 22-26

1. Paul is praying that we would experience what is true of us in Jesus. His prayer is trinitarian at its heart. How do these verses and the John 17 passage help us to understand the nature and work of the trinity?

Here is an unedited section of the sermon to help you remember and guide the conversation.

Now I want us to notice how trinitarian the prayer is – Paul names Father – Son – Spirit – trinity - he is opening us up to the nature of the experience he is praying for.

Christians have a very unique perspective on the nature of God – arising from the scriptures – followers of Jesus believe that at the center of the universe is a relationship – that God is one being who exists eternally as three persons – father son spirit – the trinity means that God is in essence relational.

What does that relationship look like? well Jesus in his prayer in our gospel reading gives us a window into that – the son glorifies the father – the father glorifies the son – What does that mean? well to glorify means to praise - to enjoy - to delight in.

In his book - the reason for God – Tim Keller – says the inner life of the trinity is characterized by mutual self-giving love – as each person of the trinity moves around the other two – orbits around the others – pouring love – delight – adoration – into the other – the early church had a word for this – perichoresis – within it is our word choreography – they were picturing a beautiful dance of love – adoration - enjoyment - delight within the relationship that is at the center of the universe.

This is the only way we can say that eternally God is love – right – because if God did not exist as a relationship - we could only say that God is love after he creates something to love – no - for as Augustine put it – God is at once lover – beloved - and love itself – God is the one that loves – that one that is loved – and the one who is love.

Now when you read the scriptures – you will find these commands of God – inviting us to love him – delight in him – glorify him – worship him – orbit our lives around him - and some people reflect back – how selfish – how self-centered of God – that he would want that of us – that he would need that of us – but he doesn't need that – for all eternity within himself – the members of the trinity have been loving – adoring – delighting – glorifying – orbiting - worshipping.

He commands those things of us – not for his sake – but for our sake – that we would know joy – that we would know love – that we would know delight – that we would know Him.

Here then is the good news of Jesus – writes Darryl Johnson - the God who is love draws near to me – a sinful – mere mortal – to draw me near to himself – in order to draw me within the circle of lover – beloved – and love itself - to become a co-lover with God. This is the very reason for my existence - and for yours – and for every other person who lives or has ever lived on this planet.

Do you know that that is the very purpose of our worship – the very reason we gather – to participate in the life of the trinity – to be caught up into the adoring – delighting – glorifying - loving relationship that is God – as James Torrance put it - worship is participating through the Spirit in the son’s relationship with the father.

And Paul prays that we would experience that – taste that – feel that – encounter that love out of which we were made – for which we were made – and to which Jesus has rescued us.

2. (vs. 16-17) Paul prays that Christ would dwell in our hearts, that we would know the love of God in our inner being. For Paul heart and inner being are synonymous. We often think of heart as the seed of our emotions, but for Paul heart is the very center of our personality, a combination of feelings, thoughts, and will. What would it look like to know the love of God in our hearts?

Again here is an unedited section of the sermon to help trigger memory and guide discussion

Now we often think of heart as the seed of our emotions – but when Paul uses that word it is synonymous with your inner being – heart is the root of your personality – the drive shaft of our very existence – the operating system of the way we navigate the world – it is the mixture of your feelings – intellect – will.

Paul is praying that the power of the Spirit be released into your life such that everything that makes you you would be flooded with the love of God.

It is to say if the love of God has emotionally lifted you up but hasn’t yet effected the way you live – it hasn’t yet touched your heart – it is to say if you get excited about his love intellectually but doesn’t impact the way you live or feel - then it hasn’t yet touched your heart – if Christianity is something you do because it’s meant to be done – but it doesn’t hit your mind or flood your emotions – it hasn’t yet hit your heart.

Once it hits your heart – Paul prays that you would mine it’s depths – that you would know the breadth of his love – wide enough to cover all people – yes even that person - that you would know the depth of his love – deep enough to reach into the deepest darkest recesses of the human heart – no one and nothing beyond his love – that you would know the length of his love – that you will be in Jesus caught up in his love for eternity – that you would know the height of his love – high enough to exalt you to the heavens.

3. This is the turning point of the letter to the Ephesians, where Paul turns from theology to praxis. He is praying in some ways that we would know the love of God to the deepest recesses of our being, for it will be that love that will form us to live in keeping with the new creation that Jesus is bringing. He uses two images to describe this – rooted and grounded. One image is agricultural, the other is architectural. What does each image communicate to us about how God’s love changes and shapes us?

As you are rooted in the love of God for you, the more you draw on his love, then the more the fruit of your life will resemble his love.

Grounded in it, our sure foundation built upon it. No matter what life brings our way, no matter what losses we face, sorrows we encounter, pains we bear, our confidence in his love will never waver, never be shaken. This image can be a corrective to the other things that we build our lives upon. Career, health, romantic love, wealth, comfort etc. All of these things will eventually crumble and disintegrate but the only sure foundation, the only thing that doesn’t change is his love for us. His love then is the only sure foundation for our lives.

4. (vs. 18) When Paul uses the word grasp or comprehend his love, he is using a word that means wrestle. Paul is saying the Spirit empowers us to wrestle down God’s love into the deep currents and movements of our hearts. In the sermon Tim spoke of how love could be wrestled down into guilt, bitterness and anger, anxiety and despair. Reflect together on these and other movements of your hearts that could be shaped by wrestling God’s love down into those places.

To help you with the discussion here is how Tim described this wrestling in the sermon...

Some of you may now be dealing with guilt – you’ve done something for which you wouldn’t want anyone else to know – that guilt keeps you from fully accepting the love of God for you – keeps you from going where he calls you – for you feel unworthy – wrestle his love down into that guilt – pin it to the mat - his love is deeper still.

Some you right now are dealing with bitterness – anger – resentment – wrestle his love down into that place in your heart – his love is broad enough to include even that person – ask for his love of them to be recreated in you – so that your bitterness – anger - resentment don’t end up consuming you.

Some of you right now are dealing with anxiety – despair – hopelessness – wrestle his love down into that place in your heart – his love is long enough to reach into eternity – his love has powerful purpose to make everything new in you and through you – wrestle it down – pin his love to the mat.

5. Paul invites us to grasp God’s love “with all the saints” - that is together as community. What are some of the ways community helps us to understand the love of God more and more?

In 1 John it says that no one has seen the invisible God but that he is known in the love that we have for one another. Rooted and grounded in God’s love, that love gets “acted out” in community so that we might have a taste, an experience of God’s love.

In preparation for the next question. Sometimes God gives us a sense of his love but we don’t talk about with others. That’s private - we say - or I can’t share that with others because it’ll make them feel – why

doesn't God do that for me?. These experiences of God's love are not meant just for our sake, they are meant for all of our sakes – they are meant to be shared.

We come to know God's love chiefly in the person and work of Jesus. As a worshipping community we reorient ourselves in prayer, in preaching, in liturgy, in song toward the Love of God for us in Jesus.

6. One of the ways we come to understand God's love is by hearing how others have come to understand it better. So this is a time, if you are comfortable, to share. How have you come to taste and experience more and more of God's love for you?

As with any question that ask for the sharing of personal stories you as the leader are integral to the conversation. I would encourage you to have a story ready to share yourself, or if you don't have a story that is readily available share how another sharing of their experience of God's love impacted you.