

Title: "The Dimensions of God's Love"

Text: Ephesians 3:14-21

My friends, all year long we have been exploring together the dimensions of God's love.

- We have been seeking to become answers to the Apostle Paul's prayer in Ephesians by grasping how wide and long and high and deep the love of Christ really is,
- and by being filled with that love to the measure of all the fullness of God.

That's what the Apostle Paul's prayer was for the Ephesian Christians, and for all Christians, even us all these years

Later,

- and we'd like to become answers to that prayer!

Let's end this series by reading that prayer once again together.

- Will you say it with me here at the beginning of the sermon, and then we will pray it again together at the end.

The dimensions of God's love.

- We discovered this year that God's love is wide enough to embrace all kinds of people.
- We just got finished looking at Nehemiah, who was a Jewish cupbearer to the King of Persia, of all things.
- But we also spent time with Esther and Mordecai, Daniel, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
- And then there was Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Gideon, Deborah.
- And so many more diverse people.
- And God's love was wide enough to embrace them all.

And His love was long enough to extend all the way from Adam and Eve and Abel and Enoch down through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to Joseph and Moses and Joshua and Rahab, of all people.

- And each week we saw that amazingly enough, his love is long enough to extend all the way forward to us as well.

As well as it being high enough to extend over the whole earth and rain down grace upon His people,

- whether they are near or far, in Jerusalem or Babylon,
-Asia or Africa, Jew or Gentile.
- God's love is high enough to be an overarching rainbow of
grace over us all.

And in these last weeks we have seen how God's love is also
deep enough to meet us in the deepest darkest valleys of
our lives.

- His love was there for His people even in exile,
-even when their nation was destroyed, and the Temple
desecrated.
- God said, "I will be a sanctuary for you no matter where
you are."

And He was.

- His love was deep enough to meet them and support them
and sustain them even in the valley of the shadow of death.
- Just as it is still for all of us.

As the writer to the Hebrews said, His love was there for His
people when they "conquered kingdoms, administered
justice, and gained what was promised,"

- as well as when they faced jeers and floggings, chains and
imprisonment, death by stoning, were sawn in two, killed
by the sword..."

Whether in the highest heights, or the darkest deep, or the
remotest place, or the farthest shore,

- His love is wide enough and long enough and high enough
and deep enough to save us and sustain and support us.

Those are the dimensions of His love.

- Has that been your experience as you look back on your life?
- You may not be able to fully grasp how wide and long and
high and deep the love of God really is,
-none of us can.
- But have you experienced it?

Have you grasped it in the sense that you have experienced
that love yourself?

- You have tasted and seen how good God is?

The Apostle Paul's prayer was not just that the Ephesian Christians would be able to talk about the love of God, -or give a biblical teaching on its dimensions.
-He actually wanted them to know that love that surpasses knowledge.
-He wanted them to experience it more and more.
-He wanted them to be filled with it to the fullness of the measure of all they were capable of receiving.

That is my prayer for us as well.

Angie Rodgers had a little taste of it this Spring in the high school Sunday School class.
-Somehow that day, the content of the gospel came alive for her and the light bulb went on.
-She said, "I get it!" And she did.
-And she wanted to be baptized, and today she will be.

In fact, today as we gather as one church body at one joint worship service
-we are going to be celebrating both of the lasting ordinances of the church that Jesus commanded us to do: baptism and communion.

And both of them beautifully highlight the dimensions of God's Love.
-In fact, we are commanded to do them so that we never forget just how wide and long and high and deep his love is.

In communion we take the bread and the cup, and we remember Jesus' body and blood, sacrificed for us.
-It was the supreme display of God's love as He sent His Son into the world to die for our sins,
-and take upon Himself all of the punishment that our sins deserved.

And by taking and eating the bread, and drinking the juice,
-he asks us to receive the forgiveness of our sins, and accept it, and trust in it;
-entering into a new covenant with him,
-and giving thanks for the depth of His love.

And when we first grasp the dimension of all God has done for us in Christ, as Angie did this Spring,
-we are meant to be baptized as an outward sign of that inward cleansing that God has done in us through His Holy Spirit.

We take water, and we are either dunked in it, or sprinkled with it, or in this church the water is poured over us,
-and it is a sign of that cleansing from sin which Christ has done in us by His death and resurrection.

It is also a sign, particularly if we are immersed in the waters of baptism.
-of our dying to that sin, and dying to that old self,
-we drown it under the water,
-and then we rise again from the water into newness of life.

That new life we have in Christ is a gift of grace, which we receive by faith.
-Being baptized doesn't mean we will never sin again.
-We all continue to sin in our lives.

But once God has touched us and poured out His love on us,
-and cleansed us in Christ and made us a new creation,
-we never have to LIVE in sin again.
-We will always know where to go with our sin...
...right back to Jesus for repentance and confession and forgiveness.

We continue to receive the mercy every day, and trust in it by faith.

We continue to celebrate communion with our brothers and sisters and affirm what Christ has done for us.

We continue to eat the bread and drink the cup and proclaim His death on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for our sins until he comes again.

This is the life of "living faith" that we persevere in together no matter what.

-And as we do, we discover again and again just how wide and long and high and deep the love of Christ really is.

It's wide enough to embrace even the likes of us.
It's long enough to last our lifetime and beyond.
It's high enough to overshadow us no matter where we are in
this world.
And it's deep enough to meet us when we are at our lowest
points, and make a way for us.

Even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
we need fear no evil, because God is with us,
-his rod and his staff they comfort us.
-his goodness and mercy they follow us.
-his loving kindness is there to prepare a table before us,
-to feed us and give us drink,
-and our cup overflows.

Is that the testimony of your life?
-Have you tasted and seen how good the love of God is?

As we bring Angie Rodgers forth for baptism today, I invite all
of us to renew our baptismal vows,
-and then to seal those vows again at the table in the new
covenant of communion.

And if you have never entered into that new covenant,
-and have not experienced this multidimensional love of
God I am proclaiming to you today,
-then this could be the day when you ask God to reveal it to
you.
-This could be the time when you invite the Holy Spirit to
come and open your eyes to see the goodness and glory
of God.
-And to see in contrast, the brokenness and dysfunction
of your life.
-And to see in Jesus Christ, the One God sent to make you
whole again.

He sent the Christ for people just like you and me, because He
loves us.
-He didn't send Jesus into the world to condemn us, but to
save us from our own brokenness and sin.

And in his death, the penalty for our sin was paid,

and in his resurrection the newness of life we could never attain on our own was won for us.

When we stop trusting in ourselves, and put our trust in what Jesus has done for us,
-the Holy Spirit comes and indwells us and that new life is given us
-and God begins the process of making us whole again.

If you have never experienced this, then ask for it today.
-Listen to the questions I will be asking Angie today about her faith as she comes to be baptized,
-see if they are also the desire of your heart and mind, and maybe you can say along with Angie "I do," to each of them.

First, let's all begin by praying this prayer of the Apostle Paul from Ephesians 3 again today.
-We read it together earlier, so you know what the words say.
-But as we come to reaffirm our baptismal covenant and to gather at the Lord's Table,
-let's pray these words together slowly.
-Pray them over Angie today.
-But pray them also for yourself.
-Pray them knowing that you are praying the words of the Bible itself,
-and so you know you are praying the will of God Himself for all of us.

Let's pray.

"For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.