

I chose the Epistle lesson, Ephesians chapter 3, for our sermon text.

The title for today's message is: **"The fullness of God"**

Paul said: ***For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,***

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

One day a home owner pulled his tools out of the garage and began fixing his backyard deck.

The city in which he lives had notified him, that he had to do some repairs to his backyard deck, or he would be fined.

He complied, and made sure that he followed the city's strict building code. The railing he built for his deck looked great, and was built well.

When he had finished, he stepped back to admire his work, and checked the original notice; it was then that he saw the words: Permit required!

Now unlike the home owner, our text for today reassures us that we have been given permission, the required permit if you will, as a gift from God.

Which allows us to live in the fullness of God. Here, Paul prays for the Gentile churches, asking for the fullness of God to be on them.

The prayer itself, is an outpouring of generosity, and goodwill towards the Ephesians.

Just as the home owner who built beautiful railings by following strict building codes, but without a permit.

How much more, are we as God's people given the permission to live, and build beautiful lives, through the fullness of God.

What is this fullness of God that Paul speaks of so eloquently? First of all, Paul describes it like this: ***according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power...***

Now, notice here that Paul emphasizes the activity, and the initiative of God the Father.

This isn't our work, or our initiative, nor is it our activity, and its certainly not something we accomplish on our own.

Rather, this is all a super-abundant gift from God. Which begins inside of our hearts.

Our "inner being" is given this gift of strength, and power through the Holy Spirit.

So that Christ is able to ***dwell in your hearts through faith***, and so we can become ***rooted and grounded in love***.

Remember, this emphasis on our inner being, is very consistent with the teachings of Christ Himself.

For example, in the gospels where He insists that it is what is within us, that defiles us.

Jesus said in Mark chapter 7: ***For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting,***

wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

Now, that’s why its so important for all these things to be driven out of our hearts, and replaced by the gifts, and fruits, of the Holy Spirit.

Simply put, Christ isn’t going to dwell in us, that is, if were not willing to let go of all the evilness within us.

Look, by Christ Himself dwelling in our hearts, and by you and I being rooted, and grounded in His love.

Our words, thoughts, and actions, will be God-pleasing, making a difference in our lives, as well as the lives of others.

If a tree has deep, and healthy roots, then the whole tree will be healthy, and it will produce beautiful, and plentiful fruit.

So, we, as God’s people, will be healthy, and produce beautiful, and plentiful fruit, if, that is, were rooted in Christ’s love.

Rooted in Christ’s love, what does that really mean? Well, its much like a solid rock foundation that’s, holding up an entire building.

The same thing, is what’s given to us out of God’s fullness, again which is placed within our hearts.

That will influence, instruct, and motivate our thinking, our feeling, our speaking, and our acting, and yes, it determines how we live.

Paul continues his prayer with these words: ***you may have strength 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, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Paul's all-inclusive language here, most certainly refers to the saving activity of our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ.

That is, His suffering and dying on the cross, and of course His being raised from the dead on the third day.

Paul says, this saving activity (salvation by and through the cross), is so large, and so wonderful, that it encompasses the entire universe!

In other words, no one, and no thing, in all of creation, is beyond, or outside of, the saving power of Jesus Christ's crucifixion, and resurrection.

Now, if that's the case, Paul says, we shall know this love of Christ, that surpasses knowledge. How will we know?

Well, there is a great truth in the old saying: "The proof is in the pudding, or The proof of the pudding is in the eating."

Look we can have all kinds of analytical, scientific, and other knowledge; and we can know as much as possible about Jesus.

However, unless, and until, we actually know, and meet Him in the everyday, practical living of our lives, we won't make much difference in the church, or in the world.

My friends Jesus loves us so much, He reaches us at the very core of our being, like no one, or nothing else can.

Therefore, shall we not want to respond to His love for us, by modeling our lives after His?

Let me tell you a short story that I think may help us all to understand what is really meant by: ***the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge***

It was February 1941, Auschwitz, Poland. The headline read, today a Franciscan priest was arrested, and put in the Auschwitz death camp.

Charges range from helping Jews escape Nazi authorities, to smuggling food into the death camp.

A few months later, a news flash read; last night, an escape took place, several prisoners are missing. Death camp rules to be enforced.

Meaning, that ten prisoners were randomly picked out, then marched into a cell where they would be starved to death for all other prisoners to see.

This action was taken as a lesson to all prisoners, against future escape attempts.

After the escape, Nazi guards were rounding up ten unfortunate prisoners who would pay the ultimate price for the earlier escape.

Now, when this one Polish Jew was picked out of a line, he began to cry out: "Wait, Wait, I have a wife and children, who need me!"

It was then, without hesitation, a Franciscan priest stepped forward, offered himself up as a replacement, for the Polish Jew.

Now, the Nazi's, not caring who went, took the Franciscan priest, along with nine other prisoners, and put them in a cell where they would eventually die from hunger.

Much to the Nazi's surprise, the Franciscan priest just wouldn't die, in fact, he managed to live long after the other nine had died.

So, the Nazis decided to inject acid into his body, in order to kill him. Now, this story was chronicled on an NBC news special, many years later.

Recently the same Polish Jew, now 82 years old, was shown retelling this story while tears streamed down his cheeks.

During the interview, a mobile camera followed him around his little white house, where there was a marble monument carefully tended with flowers.

The inscription read: In memory of the Franciscan priest who died in my place.

He said, every day since 1941, I have lived with the knowledge that, "I live because someone else died for me."

And every year he would travel to Auschwitz, in memory of the Franciscan priest.

So too, may we live each day knowing that its because Jesus died on the cross, and was raised from the dead for us, that we all live today.

For you and me, His death, and His resurrection made a huge difference in the living of our lives.

For, as Paul's conclusion to his prayer, he reminds us of God's generosity; and His super-abundance of love and power.

That He is able to accomplish things in us, and through us, far beyond our ability to ask, or to imagine. That's the meaning and power of, "The Fullness Of God".

Amen.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.