

Title: “Bow my Knees”

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Ephesians 3:14-21

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Service Readings: Gen 9:8-17; Eph 3:14-21; Mark 6:45-56

Let us pray that Christ may dwell within us and that we continue to know “the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.”

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

¹⁴For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

We know God loves us. For many of us, it was instilled from a very young age. We went to Sunday school and sang songs like “Jesus loves me” and as we grew, we found the same message all throughout scripture; John 3:16 serving as a perfect sample. God loves us so much that he sent his son into his creation to redeem us. His son, full of his love for us, took upon him our iniquities and received the full measure of wrath from the father. And after doing so, he enjoined us to him through baptism so that through his death and resurrection we now have the confident hope of salvation and everlasting life. God, indeed loves us.

When Paul wrote this letter, the church was struggling with membership – not the *quantity* but the *quality*. Was it *really* possible that the love of Jesus could, and did, encompass more than just the Jewish people, God’s chosen? This was a difficult reality to accept because up to this point the answer had been a resounding “no.” Up to this point God had chosen his people and had separated them from the rest, marking them holy and bestowing his love upon only them. The rest of the world? They were nobodies. Not a single one was destined for eternal life with God. And not a single one could change that reality. And the Jewish people treated the rest of the world in this light. So you see, the implications of Paul stating that the love of Christ included both Jews and Gentiles was both theologically and applicably enormous. If true, God’s “original” people would no longer enjoy any excuse to treat these Gentiles, these “other people” with disdain and condescension. Instead, they would have to treat them with love, the same love that they showed to one another. And that was a difficult bridge to cross.

But this is what Paul was teaching them in this portion of the letter. He describes the love of Jesus in no less than this: “what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.” This is how Paul describes Christ’s love: surpassing knowledge. His love is so vast that even our own minds fail to comprehend it. But Paul doesn’t suggest that they not even *attempt* to comprehend it, for he knows that doing so will reduce their worship to little more than lip service. And so he prays that they do understand it, and he does so in the most spectacular way: by praying that the Holy Spirit would grow in them a faith that will help them begin to comprehend the vastness of this love.

Meditate on that thought for a moment. The love of Jesus is so vast, so unimaginably large, that we need *faith* to even *begin* to comprehend it. And that love, *in all of its fullness*, is poured into each one of us.

And so the question I have for us this morning is simply this: How are you responding to being filled with the fullness of this love? *Are you living in this reality or are you just singing another verse of "Jesus Loves Me?"* Our American society may not have Gentiles, but we do have those "other people" across from us. There are democrats but there are also republicans. There is the straight community but there is also the LGBTQ one. There are pro-choice but there are also pro-life. And the list could continue but the point is that we separate ourselves from today's Gentiles no differently than the Jewish community did in their day. But Paul's message to them is this: The love of Jesus is so vast that it covers all: Jew and Gentile alike, republican and democrat, straight and gay, pro-choice and pro-life. But it is a love that comes with deep concern for our salvation. Jesus may love all, but he also desires all to be saved. He desires all to turn from sin and turn towards him. His love is a love that wants the best for us, and that means a life of repentance, for when we live our lives in this way, we live a life that begins to reflect out into the world the kind of love he has for each one of us.

And so the message from Paul is relevant to us, today. We are to share this love with all, in word and in deed, because in doing so the Gentiles of the world may come into contact with the living God. They may find themselves submerged in the vastness of his love, like a sponge in an ocean. And the Holy Spirit might spark faith in their hearts, so that they too might 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. And they might be filled with all the fullness of God. And in this way their hearts might be turned towards him and no longer be Gentile, but be Christian – a follower of Jesus.

And so maybe this morning we might think of ourselves in the same way: sponges in the vast ocean of Jesus' great love. Once dry, brittle, and dead, someone who loved us brought us to the shores and through baptism submerged us. We were made alive, united with Christ in his death and resurrection, and filled with his love. And as we left the shores and traveled back into society, we were overflowing with his love, dripping like water around us, sprinkling all who came close to us. And each week, each day, each moment when we would spend time with God, we would be renewed, refreshed, refilled with his love and our sponge would continue to be saturated.

You see, this is the kind of love Jesus has for us, and is the kind of love Paul desires us to share with others. Yes, Jesus loves us, and this we know. But it is so much greater, so much deeper than just a verse in a song. It is a love that has no beginning and no end. A love that is so vast we need his help to even comprehend it. It is a love that suffered separation from the father on our behalf so that we could enjoy union with him. It is a love that knows no bounds. And it is a love that invites us to share its richness with others.

This is the love that Jesus has for us. And for this I bow my knees to the father.

Please pray with me.

Heavenly father,

We bow our knees before you in awe of your infinite love. We thank you for the vastness of Christ's love that surpasses all understanding. Help us, Lord, to be strengthened by your Spirit, that we may begin to comprehend the breadth, length, height, and depth of your love.

Fill us anew with the fullness of your love, that it may overflow from us to all those around us - especially to those we find difficult to love. May we be like sponges, saturated with your love, sprinkling it on all we encounter.

Give us the faith to see beyond our human divisions and to recognize that your love encompasses all. Help us to extend your love to others, regardless of their background or beliefs, just as you have so graciously extended it to us.

Amen