

"Ever More"

Text: Ephesians 2:11-22

As Paul prayed for the Christians in Ephesus in our sermon text for this morning, my prayer for you is simply that each of you **"may be filled with all the fullness of God"** – a rather amazing statement if we will but take the time and make the effort to think about it.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Sometimes you just have to be in the mood to enjoy something. With some things, the time of day makes all the difference – which is why there is such a thing as a breakfast menu at restaurants. It's why programming is so different on your television morning, noon, and night (not all that many horror movies, for example, as part of the morning line-up). Other things in life are pretty much just mood driven. It's why those age-old dead-end conversations will probably never go away – *"So, what do you wanna do?" "I don't know. What do you wanna do?" "What do you feel like for dinner?" "I don't know. What do you feel like?"*

The same sort of phenomenon plays out when we approach God's Word – especially Paul's Epistles. Some of you have intimated that the New Testament Epistles are not usually your first choice when you open your Bibles. The Apostle Peter himself in his Second Epistle said that some of Paul's writings are **"hard to understand."** I get that part, but it also seems obvious that the problem lies not with the inspired Scriptures but with us. The meatier parts of Scripture take more work, more effort on our part. But that's exactly what is necessary if we really want to grow; if we really want to mature in our knowledge and walk with our God and to become the strong, full-grown Christians we are supposed to be.

The point here is that this morning's text might take a bit more effort, but the value or benefit of what our God here offers is infinitely more important than we realize and obviously well worth whatever effort we need to invest. We pray therefore first of all that our God would – right here and now – put each of us in the frame of mind to gladly hear, inwardly digest, and learn from his Word. This morning's text is found recorded in the Third Chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Church in Ephesus:

^{ESV} **Ephesians 3:14-21** *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so*

that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith--that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ²⁰ ¶ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

These are the very words of our God. May the God who verbally inspired these words give you both the wisdom and ability to fully appreciate and receive the gifts here offered. To that end we pray: **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

One of the many difficult lessons that Christians need to learn and relearn is the difference or balance between *contentment* and *complacency*. God wants the former; he detests the latter – which means learning to keep this whole thing straight in our minds is much more than a frivolous or pointless exercise. But there's another distinction here. While God's Word consistently encourages contentment in connection with the things of this world, God never advocates contentment in connection with your level of wisdom, understanding, love, or devotion to him and his Word. Unfortunately we tend to get this exactly backwards. While we tend to be content with the little we know about God and his Word, we have an insatiable appetite for all the silly things that will all get vaporized at the coming of our Lord.

Want proof that you, personally, have a problem in this area? Do this simple test. Ask yourself first if you've ever felt anxious that you are missing a sale at the mall, or that the summer seems to be slipping away and you haven't been able to get out and do the things you hoped to do – projects around the house, fishing, camping, boating, swimming – whatever it is you like to do. Have you ever felt almost physically ill when you heard that someone was selling *exactly* what you were looking for for pennies on the dollar? Then ask yourself if you've ever felt anxious because you are missing out on spiritual gifts and growth – anxious because time is slipping away and you just aren't getting in the Bible-time and spiritual growth you want. Ever had that sick feeling because you missed a really great Bible study or some other chance to grow spiritually? That's pretty solid proof of a problem, isn't it?

This brings us to the first part of *"Ever More"* (our sermon title) with which we need to come to terms. It is absolutely *amazing* just how much stuff there is to do out there – always and ever *more*. We have opportunities that would boggle the minds of our grandparents. So many things to do in fact that the variety itself has become a source of stress and anxiety in our society. We hear of this couple doing this or that family doing that, and somehow it all creates this pressure that we have to do not just *some* of those things but *all* of those things, or we are somehow missing out. We've got to get out camping. We've got to get out fishing. We've got to make it to the River a few times. We've got to get back to Medora one of these weeks. There's free stuff at Menards, a sale at Kohl's, the flower garden needs attention, the cars need to be serviced and washed, we need to plan our next vacation, get ready for company, clean the house, shop for new furniture, have some friends over, and on and on and on. Always and ever more.

At the outset we talked about being in the mood to do something like study the Epistles of Paul. The point is that that probably is never going to happen *unless* we first deal with the potentially bad sort of "ever more" of life. We are never going to be able to concentrate and appreciate the priceless gifts there offered unless and until we learn to let go of the "ever more" of our secular world. Only when we get to the point where we are no longer in a panic that we are missing out on that kind of "ever more" will we be able to deal with our spiritual complacency problem.

And it is a problem. Time and the human condition is a zero sum game. That means that there are only so many hours in a day, so many days in a year, so many years in a lifetime. The result is that we can't add more to an overbooked life unless we cut something out. And we will never be willing to cut anything out unless we learn Godly contentment in connection with the temporary stuff and lose our ungodly complacency when it comes to the spiritual.

There's another lesson that is most often learned only by cold, hard experience: *things never get better unless they get better today*. "Someday" never gets here. That means that the very best of intentions always fades with time. We will never read or study our Bibles more if we do not do so *now*. We will never grow in our knowledge and wisdom if we do not grow *now*. We will never advance in our Christian walk if we do not make progress *today* and then *every day thereafter*. In all of this it really does most often come down to now, or never.

This brings us back to our text for this morning, where God's Word talks about a different sort of "ever more." Paul wants *more* for the Christians in

Ephesus – and therefore also for those Christians reading his words today. The "more" that Paul wants is Christian growth. Listen again – carefully this time – to what he says: ***"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father... that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being."*** Again, this isn't light reading. It takes effort, but the reward is well worth the effort. The Holy Spirit here informs us that he wants us to become stronger ***"in our inner being."*** Do you understand the thought, the wish? He is not talking about superficial knowledge but core spiritual strength. He goes on to explain, completing that explanation with these words: ***"... to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."***

We are obviously kidding ourselves if we imagine that we are anywhere near the level of sanctification or Christian growth that our God wants to see in us. There is obviously more. Much more. Ever more. But that's not supposed to be a *discouragement* but a divine *encouragement*. The very fact that these God-inspired words call for such growth is reliable evidence that not only does such growth really exist, it means it is also *attainable*, and that it can in fact be ours.

That's not so say, of course, that the gospel itself is incomplete and inadequate to save souls. Of course it is. Trusting that Jesus did exactly what he said he did – which was to offer his life as the one necessary payment for the sins of all mankind – trusting that he accomplished what he set out to do *is saving faith*. The problem that our text addresses is our inner spiritual weakness; our near-constant doubts, anxieties and apprehensions – all of which pose a continual threat to our faith.

Do you fully understand all of this? Of course not. Neither do I. How could we when our text describes this as ***"the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge"***? We know that we are saved by faith alone in Jesus Christ. In this truth we stand, fully forgiven in God's sight. Yet our God desires much greater strength of faith for us and in us. Though we don't fully comprehend all that this involves, we have been given a roadmap on how to get there.

Think of it this way. Do you remember the Calculus and Trigonometry classes you took in kindergarten? Of course not. No one takes those courses until well after the basics of simple arithmetic and math have been mastered. Nothing makes sense unless and until you build on what you already know. Yet once you learn more, you never look back

and determine that the basics were wrong. In fact it is the basics that form the foundation and core for everything that follows. Yet by the same token the more complexity you master, the more you are enabled to solve ever more complex problems.

Carry those same truths into the realm of Christian faith. At the same time that Paul **"determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified"** he also wanted to **"be filled with all the fullness of God."** This was not because simply trusting that Jesus died for his sins was inadequate to save him, but because the threats to saving faith were and are complex. Satan's attacks are multifaceted, and the dizzying variety of the everyday decisions of life often require advanced Christian training and strength. God does not want to see Christians limp feebly across the finish line. He wants bold strong representatives who are **"able to give an answer to those who ask the reason for the hope that is in us."** That's why our God offers us ever more in the way of strength, wisdom, knowledge, love, and confidence. That's in part what he means in our text when he voiced his desire that we **"may be filled with all the fullness of God."**

Which brings us to the final "ever more" – which really is the one that gives purpose and urgency to all the others, to this whole discussion. While life will always offer ever more distractions, and while our God will always desire ever more spiritual growth and strength for his children, the urgency comes in recognizing that there is after this life a for-ever more. Life on earth is "for keeps" in that what happens here determines what will happen to us for all of eternity. The stakes, in other words, are eternal. In our text Paul alluded to that fact with these words: **"to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever."**

Our natural laziness and spiritual complacency is like the fat, lazy teenager in each of us that doesn't want to hear the call to **"rise and shine."** That part of us doesn't want to be reminded of the reality of hell. It just wants to indulge itself at all times and in every way, to roll over and cover its head with the "pillow" of this world's creature comforts. No effort, no work, no struggle, no striving. Just leave me alone and let me sleep. And in my experience that's *always* the cause of spiritual death in Christians. I've never heard of even one Christian who went right from strong, growing Christian to rank, full-blown unbeliever. Christians first starve themselves, and then die in their sleep. That is, they first weaken themselves through neglect of the means of Grace – to the point that they no longer care. In that state even the threat of eternal torment in hell thuds dully on their sleepy ears and they reply eventually with that terrifying, **"Whatever."**

Our text therefore reminds us finally of the *forevermore* nature of the struggle we are in. Our God, who exists in eternity, never loses sight of the fact that eternity is forever, and that every single human soul will spend that eternity in unspeakable torment or unimaginable bliss. Among then those gifts we ask our God to give us this morning is the wisdom and consistency to remember at all times the consequences of the struggle we are in and to prioritize our lives accordingly. May the God who desires eternal life for each of us, so bless us this morning. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Genesis 9:8-17** Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, ¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." ¹² And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³ I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." ¹⁷ God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

^{ESV} **Mark 6:45-56** Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶ And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. ⁴⁷ And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. ⁴⁸ And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, ⁴⁹ but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, ⁵⁰ for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." ⁵¹ And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, ⁵² for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. ⁵³ ¶ When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored to the shore. ⁵⁴ And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized him ⁵⁵ and ran about the whole region and began to bring the sick people on their beds to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.

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The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost – July 26, 2015

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 296 (Red Hymnal)

"Speak O Lord Thy Servant Heareth"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 22ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Genesis 9:8-17) Our two readings this morning progress from *never* more to *ever* more. Our first is the account of the aftermath of the Flood and God's promise nevermore to destroy the earth by flood. Obviously God has kept that promise and will continue to keep that promise. He cannot do otherwise. The message and comfort that we take from this reading is that God still today not only keeps his promises, but has power over the "forces of nature."

The New Testament Lesson: (Mark 6:45-56) Our second reading goes from nevermore to evermore. Jesus here demonstrates his ongoing power over the forces of nature. We should again find comfort and assurance in that. Yet here we also note the ongoing love Jesus had (and still has) for mankind – continually giving more and more of himself. This giving continued until he gave all that he had, his innocent death on the cross, which won our forgiveness, forever. That innocent death still saves us today, paying the debt also for our own personal sins.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 38 (Verses 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"The Lord My God Be Praised"

The Sermon – Text: Ephesians 3:14-21 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Ever More"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Offering followed by the Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn - 310 (Verses 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Thy Table I Approach"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution -Hymn 315- (Red Hymnal)

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn - 38 (Verse 5) (Red Hymnal)

"The Lord My God Be Praised"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Sunday (48) Average (51)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time
Thurs-Fri	-10:00 a.m.	– Vacation Bible School
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service

CLC News – Pastor Paul Krause is scheduled to be installed today as pastor of Trinity of Watertown, SD. Teacher graduate Leah Ude has returned the call from Redeemer of Cheyenne to open a pre-school there. That congregation has now issued a one-year call to Becky McKenney.

Council Meeting Notes – Five Council members, plus the Pastor, attended the July 22 meeting. Treasurer Adams reported year-to-date offerings and expenses in line with the budget. Additional baffles have been purchased to address the echo problem in the fellowship hall and are awaiting installation. The sprinkler system work remains an ongoing project. The Audit Committee has completed their work and found the church books to be in good order. Constitution and Bylaw changes are being prepared to define our doctrinal position regarding marriage. Quarterly Voters' meeting is Sep. 27. Next Council meeting is Aug. 30

Vacation Bible School – VBS is scheduled for Thursday and Friday of this week. Teachers please meet with the Pastor during the fellowship time.

Audit Committee – Our thanks to this year's Audit Committee, Keith Mantz and Mick Johnson, for their work.