

Sunday 29 July 2018 Cathedral, Grahamstown 7.30 & 9.30 a.m.		10th Sunday after Pentecost 17th Sunday of the Year B Archdeaconry Family Day
2 Sam 11:1-15	Ps 14	Ephesians 3:14-21
		John 6:1-21
THAT YOU MAY KNOW THE LOVE OF CHRIST		

“...may you have power to comprehend ... what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Ephesians 3:18-19)

We are gathered here as the family of the archdeaconry of Grahamstown for our Family Day service. Welcome!

Greetings to the Archdeacon of Grahamstown and Sub Dean, the Ven Mzinzi Dyantyi; Cathedral Chancellor Revd Canon Dr Claire Nye Hunter; Director for Development, Canon Melany Adonis; Rural Dean-designate Mvuleni Mvula; all clergy present; your spouses; guild leaders and executives; churchwardens and PCC; Lay Ministers; all our guilds – BMG, AWF, MU, St Agnes; St Mary Magdalene; DYG; Altar Servers; Sunday School... choirs... all the people of God, the faithful gathered here in worship! I greet you all, and welcome you to the Cathedral, in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

EPHESIANS - Background

The NT consists of a number of different books: the four gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the book of Revelation, and a series of letters, written to the churches. We all know about the four gospels, but perhaps are not as familiar with the letters. Yet out of the 27 books of the NT, 21 of them are letters, some very long – 1 and 2 Corinthians; others very short – the letter of Jude, which has only 25 verses. Each letter has its own context and theme. Each one is different.

The letter to the Ephesians... written to the church in Ephesus, a city in what is now Turkey – to the Christian community in that place. He had a special relationship with this Christian community (cf. Acts 20:17ff.) It is a general letter, written to encourage and teach, rather than to correct or address local problems. So although it was written about 2000 years ago, it is easy for us to hear it as a letter to us the Christian community here in Grahamstown. And as the parishes of the Archdeaconry gathered, we are a significant part of that community.

It is a great letter, with powerful themes. We are not used to writing or reading letters any more. We are more used to smses, whatsapp, tweets – a few thoughts in a few words. Paul’s letters to the churches – Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, etc. – are not tweets or smses. They are long, full of detail, rich, varied, and worthy to be read and listened to, prayed through.

Today’s sermon is part of a sermon series on Ephesians. The Letter helps us to ask questions about the nature and the life of the church:

What sort of church are we called to be, at a time like this?

What is God’s call to us, as the church, at this time?

In the midst of struggle and heartache and despair, can we find hope?

Can we be a community of life and hope?

In our personal pain and struggles, in our national political and social turmoil, do we as the church, as the body of Christ, have a role to play?

Because it is about the church – not an NGO, or a club, or society - that we are engaged. The church as God’s instrument, the body of Christ as the living witness to Jesus Christ – “Go into the world and make disciples...I am with you until the end of time” (Matt 28:16-20). At a time when more and more people are simply giving up on the life of the institutional church, or walk away, or change churches because the grass seems greener on the other side of the fence, or criticise the church – and let’s be honest, the church is not perfect – this is a time

to reflect deeply on our calling to be the church. And perhaps to rediscover, or be reminded, why we are the church.

Just in passing... there is something of a link between Ephesians and Colossians – both written, probably, by St Paul while he was in prison. Yet from that place of captivity and confinement pours out this wealth of riches, teaching, love and prayer. (Perhaps a reminder that while you and I might not be locked in Waainek prison, we might be experiencing times of closed doors, barred windows, helplessness and powerlessness – could such times be a time of deepening, pouring out, prayer?)

Colossians – focus on the nature and person of Christ – “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible,, he is before all creation, and in him all things hold together...” (Col 1:15-20)

Ephesians – the focus is on Christ *in his church*. “The church is cosmic in scope, embracing the whole universe... the mission of the church is to bring salvation to the whole of creation... the church is equipped for its mission because it is built on ‘the foundation of the apostles and prophets’ ”.

So, fallible and imperfect and at times deeply flawed as the church is, however much we might be frustrated with the church, it remains God’s instrument.

PRAYER AND PRAISE

Chapters 1 – 3 an extended prayer, adoration, doctrine and teaching, and culminating in prayer – great gospel themes

Praise to God (1:3-14)

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...” (Eph 1:3)

- thanksgiving to God for salvation
- reminding us of what God has done
- adoption as his children
- redemption through his blood
- forgiveness of our trespasses
- he has made known to us the mystery of his will
- marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit

A prayer for the readers – the church (1:15-23)

“... I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him...” (Eph 1:17)

- that you may know the hope to which he has called you
- the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints
- the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe

How the readers (Ephesians) were saved (2:1-10)

- once dead in our trespasses and sins
- children of wrath
- by grace you have been saved through faith

“For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” (Eph 2:10)

The unity of Gentiles and Jews in the Church (2:11-22)

- you were at that time without Christ

- you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ
- for he is our peace
- he has broken down the dividing wall of hostility between us (Jews and Gentiles)
- reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross
- peace to those who were far off and peace to those who were near
- a dwelling place for God
- **reconciliation of enemies, breaking down the walls that divide us, in our broken and divided world. Radical stuff! Divisions of race, gender, tribe, language, social groups and class...**

PAUL'S GREAT PRAYER (Eph 3:14-21)

For all these reasons...Paul now prays for the church. My prayer for us all. Our prayer for one another. Our parishes, archdeaconry, diocese, other churches...a prayer for spiritual strength and knowledge...a prayer we use at weddings, for a new couple setting out on their journey together... for families

... I bow my knees before the Father – who cares for his children; who we are called to obey...

Three parts to the prayer – three intentions:

- He may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit – not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength – power to be strong and not lose heart;
- That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith – that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in;
- That you may have the power to comprehend and know the depth and wonder of the love of Christ – that you will be able 5

to take in the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love – to experience and savor and taste the breadth and length and depth – to live full lives, full in the fullness of God – God's love as the firm and secure basis for our lives!

St Paul returns to this theme of God's constant love for us, again and again:

“God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which he has given to us” (Rom 5:5)

“What can separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble, or hardship, or danger, or death...? No! In all these things we are more than conquerors... there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours in Jesus Christ...” (Rom 8:35-38)

Eph 3:21 is the Doxology – closing words to the prayer – a promise and affirmation of the glory of God - what is and what will be – far more than we can ask or imagine...

“Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish far more than we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.” (Eph 3:21)

What is your world like? Perhaps it is a world of hopelessness, despair, grief, loss and sorrow. Perhaps your world is one of rage and anger is all around you. Perhaps you are deeply anxious and fearful for the future. Perhaps you are struggling to find meaning and purpose. This prayer, these words, are for you and me... to remind, to encourage.

THEREFORE...

I want to encourage us in our life as the church. I have always been part of the church; difficult at times, hanging on by my fingernails at times, yet enriched and blessed beyond all telling to have been part of this community of faith, Anglicans, journey of faith in Christ together. I am forever grateful, thankful to God for the life of the church. I am also critical at times. I have concerns. But let's not allow our concerns to overshadow, to dominate, to become the main or central agenda! God's love is our central focus and agenda!

My concerns:

People leaving the church for other churches – yes, we do move from community to community, different friendship groups; but moving because of seeking power or status, for personal agendas is not right. Adultery and dishonesty in relationships leading to marriage and family breakdown...shaming the name of Christ, shaming the church (cf. David and Bathsheba, today's reading, 2 Sam 11)

Members undermining leadership with backstabbing...

Anger and distrust...

The many who claim the name of Christ but are at best occasional worshippers; we are the poorer without their resources and energy and input and skills; we struggle on... I long so deeply for people to be seized by the love and wonder of God... we put on a banquet, a bounty, a feast of worship and encounter each week... those who simply choose not to bother...

Does your life and mine reflect the light and love of Christ?

Return to the gospel of Christ, who has blessed us, redeemed us, saved us...

A special word for the archdeaconry: SPUR

S Be filled with the **Spirit of God**

P Rest in the **purposes of God**

U Be carried in the **unending love of God**

R Run the **race of God**. Don't give up!

CONCLUSION

May you and I know the love of Christ.

Thank you, well done, congratulations, God bless you! Amen.

© Andrew Hunter

July 2018