

“I Have Heard About You!”

Dear Friends in Christ,

We are privileged in our continuing sermon focus on Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians to “*eavesdrop*” today on the inspired writer’s words of Thanksgiving, Prayer and Grace. It almost feels to me when reading the Epistles from the Bible that we are peeking in on someone’s diary, opening someone’s mail or email without their permission, or poking around in a space in someone’s heart that is personal and private. But then, that’s the gem of God’s Holy Word...it’s meant for us “*to read, learn and inwardly digest*” as an old hymnal prayer expresses...feeling as if the Holy Spirit is speaking to us...and about us.

So, listen again to this pastor named Paul, who spent three years in Ephesus, more time than with any other congregation founded during his missionary journeys. In a continuation of the prayer for spiritual and heavenly blessings **in Christ** from last week’s lesson, the Apostle gets ever close and personal, writing:

*For this reason, because **I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.*** (Ephesians 1:15-16)

Every pastor that I know; every missionary and spiritual leader, deaconess, DCE, Vicar and church worker would love to echo such words about the people of God...yea, the people of Hope: “***I have heard of your faith and your love***” **IN CHRIST!** Not as bragging or pride; not boasting or arrogant; taking no credit but giving all the glory to God! It is a statement filled with unceasing thanks and prayer that unfolds in what has to be one of the longest sentences in the Bible - covering 6 verses without taking a breath!!! I can almost feel the passion and pace, excitement and energy as Pastor Paul pens these heart-felt words to a people so deeply loved by Christ:

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. (Ephesians 1:16-21)

(Take a breath...right!) Right, because God is so good that struggling sinners like the people of Ephesus and like you and me are privileged “by grace through faith **in Christ**” to be included in that prayer! We are the ones, you see, who are referenced in Ephesians 2:

*“And you were dead in trespasses and sins...the sons and daughters of disobedience...by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind! **But God**, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ...For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:1-9)*

So when we struggle, question, doubt, grieve, waver, sin and disobey...our words and actions often betraying the faith we profess...that’s when we take another peek into Paul’s letter which wraps us in prayer that “*God would give us the Spirit of wisdom; our hearts enlightened that we may know the hope to which we are called!*” (Ephesians 1:18)

It is “*hope*” rooted in the promises of God’s Word; it is “*hope*” poured out upon us in the waters of Holy Baptism; it is “*hope*”

personally experienced every time we come to this table and hear Jesus say: *“My body broken...my blood shed...for you...for the forgiveness of sins!”* It is *“hope’s”* victory on the Cross of Calvary where the nails could not hold the Lamb of God there...but love did! It is *“hope”* emanating from the light of the tomb’s open door for indeed the Risen and Victorious Christ is the Savior of whom Paul speaks when he prays: *“And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”* (Ephesians 1:22-23)

This powerful prayer of Paul from today’s lesson reminded me of the lyrics of a wonderful praise song about Jesus:

*You are my strength when I am weak
You are the treasure that I seek
You are my all in all
Seeking You as a precious jewel
Lord to give up I'd be a fool
You are my all in all*

*Taking my sin my cross my shame
Rising again I bless your name
You are my all in all
When I fall down you pick me up
When I am dry You fill my cup
You are my all in all*

*Jesus Lamb of God worthy is Your name...
Jesus Lamb of God worthy is Your name*

- Written by: Dennis Jernigan Lyrics © Warner/Chappell Music, Inc. Used by permission.
CCLI Song Select # 825356. License # 1223330

This letter from Pastor Paul, this thanksgiving and prayer, the promise of being *“saved by grace through faith, a gift from God,”* is not simply a spiritual pep talk, my friends. No, God knows us intimately, which is why my ongoing, personal prayer is always: *“Thank you God, for loving me, even though you know me.”* By His

grace, we are all privileged and empowered to make HIM known “*by our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and our love toward all the saints.*” It is the outcome and the outflow of God’s grace working in our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit. Oh, how much better our lives would be...and how much better we would be in the lives of others...if we lived by faith and expressed Christ’s love as Paul encourages: “*For we are his workmanship, created **in Christ** Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* (Ephesians 2:10)

So, let’s get personal and practical for a moment...what does that look like...sound like as we go about our daily lives **IN CHRIST**? Maybe it’s someone saying about us: “*I was inspired, moved and encouraged by your trust in the Lord when things were so challenging in your life.*” Perhaps a family member or friend heard you praying, saw you worshipping regularly, or listened as you shared in a winsome conversation how much Jesus means to you? It could have been a moment when you expressed kindness and forgiveness to someone who did you wrong, holding no grudges; or your love took on flesh when you made time to visit, call, listen or take a meal to someone feeling loneliness or grief. Maybe in this divisive and troubled world, in your family and neighborhood you are the voice of calm and reason, positive and accepting, advocating justice, care and concern for all people! It’s you and me, praying for each other and others, never forgetting our mission as the people of Hope to “*proclaim and live the Word and love of Christ.*

Oh, how I pray that our pastors might say of Christ’s church and people in this place: *For this reason, because **I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,** I/we do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.* (Ephesians 1:15-16)

May it be so **in Christ!** AMEN.

- Rev. Preston E. Wagner, Pastor *Emeritus*