

The background of the image is a dark blue field filled with a complex, abstract pattern. This pattern consists of numerous thin, wavy lines in shades of red, green, and yellow, which intersect to form a dense, grid-like texture. The lines are not perfectly straight, giving the overall effect a sense of movement and depth, reminiscent of a traditional tartan or kirkin pattern.

KIRKIN' OF THE TARTAN **ROOTED AND GROUNDED**

EPHESIANS 3:14-21

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Last weekend, I had the very great pleasure of being part of the group of volunteers that showed off our church to visitors as part of Unlock Lambton. It was a wonderful and fun experience, watching first-time visitors step into our sanctuary and seeing it in ways we might not, in our familiarity with its pillar and arches, the gleaming rows of pews and the pipes of our organ. The stained glass windows, though, are often what people really wanted to spend some time appreciating: the vibrant colours, the symbol-laden imagery, the family names...the story each window tells. We've been doing that, too, for the last several Sundays, in our bulletin.

Stained glass windows like ours are beautiful to look at. Back in the early days of stained glass window making, many centuries ago, they served a different purpose, not really commemorative or artistic, but story-telling. You see, many centuries ago, most people couldn't afford to own a Bible and couldn't have read it if they did. The ready access to God's Word that we take for granted today was not something that European Christians had, in the past.

So stained glass windows served to remind people of the stories and truths of Scripture in picture form: most of our windows feature the stories of Jesus and the New Testament, but Old Testament stories and people are popular subjects for stained glass, too. In one of the first churches I preached in there was a big stained glass window right at the back; I had Abraham, Moses and Isaiah staring me down, all through the worship service. Very intimidating.

Although we all have or could have Bibles of our own, our windows still remind us of what the Bible teaches. They also remind us of our history as a congregation, written into the physical structure of our church. They are the stories of St. Andrew's families set side-by-side with the stories of our Christian faith. Our shared foundation as a congregation, as real and necessary as the brick and mortar and stone laid down in 1867.

Every life has some kind of roots and foundation. In the passage of Scripture we read together today, this excerpt from Paul's letter to the new Christian congregations at Ephesus, Paul prays for our life to be rooted and grounded in God's love. The Bible is inspired by the Spirit, but it is not always inspiring to read: sometimes it challenges us, or comforts us, or makes us think instead.

But then sometimes you run across a passage like this one: an inspired text that not only inspires us, it almost lifts you right out of your pew, it's so powerful and hopeful. It's prayer and praise and blessing, all in one.

Paul had just been reviewing with the Ephesian Christians the wonderful fact that the gospel of Jesus had been opened not just to God's usual people, the Jews, from whose history salvation had emerged, but also to the Gentiles, which was a way of saying "everybody else, everywhere."

So the good news is also big news, for every family on earth, all of whom take their name from God. The word for 'family' that Paul used doesn't mean a single family, of parents and children, and grandparents and grandchildren. Paul said 'patria' and that means family in the biggest sense of the word, like nation, tribe or clan. And then Paul breaks off to tell these new Christians how he prays for them.

It's interesting what Paul doesn't say he prays for. I mean, these are new churches in an urban setting with all the spiritual and moral challenges that entails. But Paul doesn't pray that they and their churches will be successful and well-funded. He doesn't pray that they will be healthy, wealthy and wise. He doesn't pray that there will be no challenges or obstacles to overcome, that they will grow and it'll be easy. Paul doesn't even pray that they will be able to stand up to political foes in the Roman Empire, or spiritual foes in the form of other religions, or moral foes in a society with a different set of values. Paul doesn't pray any of that for them.

No, Paul prays for strength through the Spirit to bring Christ more fully into their hearts. And he prays that they'll have power through that same Spirit, but not for political purposes to deal with the Romans or physical muscle to defend one another or legislative clout to rewrite the laws of their society.

Paul doesn't pray that they will have power to, but power through. The kind of power Paul prays for is power through the Spirit to grasp the otherwise ungraspable.

The second thing Paul prays for them is that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith.

From New Testament times to today, Christianity has struggled with the danger of being understood as a set of good ideas, something that can be learned about or known about, like any other set of ideas about something. Paul exerted a lot of effort to unpack and warn against this mistake. Jesus can be known about; our gospel can be put into words. It is a story.

But memorizing a story, or building your life on a set of ideas from that story, is not the gospel itself. A Christian life is built, it begins, by being rooted and grounded in love, Christ's love, not ours. Only then can we have faith and power to grasp the scale and scope of that love. The indwelling of Christ is not a further definition of the strengthening Paul prays for, but rather a second way of preparing us inwardly for knowing the gospel and being loved by God. Paul prays that God would strengthen us through his Spirit and to keep us in such close communion with Jesus that the best way to describe it is to say that Christ dwells - or abides - in us, and we in him.

Words like communion and union, oneness, abiding and dwelling...these are relationship words, describing, here in Ephesians or elsewhere in the Bible, the nature of our relationship with Jesus. Like all healthy relationships, the one between us and Jesus needs to be worked at, to keep it vibrant and strong. How do you keep your marriage good, or your relationship with your partner healthy? What do you do to keep up a deep and lasting friendship? You spend time together often; you talk to each other. You trust each other, trust the relationship, even when you can't quite get along or figure out why they're doing what they're doing. You remember good times you've had together, and how you came together to get through the bad times, and tell each other the story of your life together, from a place of loving and knowing.

Have you ever done those things with Jesus? Have you ever said to Jesus, do you remember that time I thought I couldn't keep going? But in the end, I could because I knew that you, Jesus, were with me? Do you spend time listening to God, each day, and talking, too, just as you would with your spouse or your partner or your best friend? That's how we begin the work of relationship-building with Jesus; he'll meet us more than halfway when we try. And we know that because of how incredibly big God's love for us really is.

There is an unusual thing about the Jewish language in the Bible, about how it expresses the scale and scope of things.

It appears, I think, in Paul's letters sometimes, too; which makes sense, since Paul was Jewish even if he was writing in Greek. In English, if I wanted to say that something was really big, I would say, that is the biggest thing I have ever seen. If I was an ancient Biblical Hebrew writer, I would say, that thing is big, big, big.

Kind of like how we run into phrases like, holy, holy, holy Lord; the writer is trying to tell us that God's not just a little holy or average holy, he's the holiest. Here, Paul describes the love that Christ has for us. It's not just deep love, or wide love; this love has height and depth and breadth and length. It is love, love, love, love, in every direction.

That is how Christ loves us. And that's a lot of love.

We need both power through the Spirit to make us strong and uninterrupted indwelling communion with Jesus to know that love, and to get the best and last bit of what Paul prays for in this letter. As Paul's own heart - so full of the love of Christ - as Paul's own heart begins to burst with joy, he breaks into a doxology, a verse of praise and gratitude, and a blessing. He gives all the glory and love back to God, Father, Son and Spirit, who not only can do what we ask and hope for, but can do even more than we can imagine. Inspiring doesn't really do it justice; Paul's writing is powerful and buoyant and uplifting.

This doxology and blessing is more than the end of his prayer; it's the culmination, what it's all been in aid of: receiving the fulness of God. There is a movement in this prayer, one that is meant to reveal the experience of building your life, rooted and grounded in Christ's love. Life should move from being 'in progress' to being complete, from empty to full. That fulness belongs to God, and it's something that God gifts us through Christ. In the usual Christian paradox-way, we are given the gift of faith and fulness, but it still continues to be our goal, something that is fully realized in experience, through spiritual growth. God doesn't withhold anything from us, but we're only able to receive in the measure of our spiritual capacity. Like a reusable water bottle; God will refill us again and again, but if we only hold a litre, that's our maximum capacity.

Unlike a water bottle, though, we can grow to hold more and more, and that's part of the gift, too. The goal of this life is to be filled with as much of God's fulness as we can hold, and that's the foundation of a Christian life, and the root of a faith that endures.

Did you know that Presbyterianism, as a way of being the church together, is Scottish? It originated in the 16th century, drawing on Reformation theology and ideas from the European continent, but emerging as a distinctive branch of Christianity, the Church of Scotland. From there, it spread, carried first by theologians and ministers, then by migrating Scots leaving their homeland, and finally by missionaries, sent out from established Presbyterian congregations. There are Presbyterian churches on every continent except Antarctica, and some 75 million Presbyterian Christians around the world. There are around 325,000 in Scotland, and about 80,000 here in Canada. There are 1.5 million in India, more than 4 million in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa and some 9 million in South Korea. No kilts and bagpipes in those places; but all sharing a common root that grew in Scotland, some 460 years ago. That's a root and solid ground that we share in common with our families, our clans, our sisters and brothers in Christ, across time and oceans and continents, deeper even than blood: a heritage of faith, that gifts us with the goal and the capacity to be filled with all the fulness of God.

This prayer is the gospel at its poetically powerful best. But Paul was no ivory tower theologian, drifting high on a cloud away from the realities and concerns of everyday life. Paul understood the practicalities and the challenges we face. He knows we need bread to eat and water to drink, a roof over our heads and clothes on our backs. He knows we could do with a lot of things he didn't include in this prayer, for ourselves, for our families, and for our churches. We all pray for those things, and so did Paul; in his letters, he thanks congregations for financially and materially supporting him in his ministry and his life.

Yet at the core to it all is the power of the Spirit, the love of Christ, and the fulness of God in our hearts - a triune gift on this Trinity Sunday! Take that gift away and nothing else matters. Add it in, and we can experience joy, growth, peace and purpose; and we can endure all kinds of tragic and unhappy things without our faith being damaged or destroyed by them. The high, long, wide, deep love of Jesus endures, too, and stays with us beyond the boundary of our short time here on earth. It is eternal, it endures, and it bigger than each of our lives, binding us together, making us one with Christ and with each other.

And you know, I think that love has the power to make us big to match it.

I bet that most of us have had a first-time encounter with something that has made us feel small in the face of it: being on a boat, out of sight of land; seeing the ocean or the endless night sky; standing in the midst of the open prairie or before a high mountain range; or holding your child in your arms for the first time. Those kinds of things can make us feel very small in comparison. The love of Christ, its height and depth and breadth and length, its bigness, should make us feel small.

But do we let it shrink us down further, and remain small? Or do we let that love fill us up, expanding us to be as big-big-big as it is?

God is love, abounding, unimaginable love. It's the source of all we know, and the deepest answer to our hardest questions. It can do more than we can ever ask for or imagine. It is a gift and a promise worthy of inspiring, powerful words: every Christian life can be rooted and grounded in that love, and be filled to the brim with as much of God's fulness as we can manage to hold. Thanks be to God. Amen.