

High St Uniting Church Frankston
Ephesians 3:14 - 21

Measureless Love



One of the unspoken truths of a Christian community is that we all have different understandings and different theologies and I respect that, and, while I have my understanding and theology, I try to find a variety of styles and approaches to worship and preaching. But today's reading has no room for alternate readings or understandings. This is Paul wishing that everyone knew and experienced the love of Christ and the life and power of Christ that he knew. To those who were just taking up a new

religion or philosophy, Paul says, "No, may Christ dwell in your hearts through faith." To those who wanted to park God and Christ in a small part of their lives, he says, "No, may you come to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge." To those who feel powerless in the world and just think in terms of a private religion, he says, "The power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine." Paul wants us all to experience the immeasurable, all-conquering, life and world changing love of God in Christ Jesus. Far beyond philosophy or religion, far beyond lip service or community membership. Far beyond disagreements about theology, this is the power and possibility of being filled with the fulness of God. The prayer of a pastor wanting his people to know and experience what he knew and experienced.

There is plenty of doubts in the scholarship that the letter we have as Ephesians was written by the Apostle Paul and that it was addressed to the church at Ephesus. The language and writing style, the themes and ideas and the change in position on some matters all point to a disciple of Paul writing in Paul's name and style to people who didn't know him. But finding out that this passage we heard today, these eight verses, is one long sentence in Greek recalls the image of Paul walking up and down the room with Silvanus the scribe sitting in the corner, furiously trying to capture all that Paul is saying. No pauses for punctuation, not four separate prayer requests and a doxology, just one long stream of thought trying to capture this wish for people to know the immensity and power of being a disciple filled with the Spirit and love of God.

So high you can't get over it,
So low you can't get under it,
So wide you can't get 'round it.

Or

Wide, wide as the ocean
High as the heavens above
Deep, deep as the deepest sea
Is my Saviour's love.

These words about the immensity of God's love, that don't seem to have come through into modern songs, are not just a spiritual reminder that we can't walk out of God's love and care, like Psalm 139 about not being able to escape God. Paul set out from Jerusalem and travelled over 15000 kilometres across what is now seven different nations, then possibly

twice as many cultures, following the call of the Spirit to share the love of God. He knew how immense and immeasurable God's love was. As well as being one long sentence, there is a little play on words in this passage that gets lost in English – "I bow my knees before the Father, *pater*, from whom every family, *patria*, takes its name." Another reminder of the multi-national nature of Paul's ministry. All those strongly patriarchal cultures that he ministered to and with, are not ultimately human patriarchies; they owe their origin and name to God. Paul experienced the love of God walking around with just one or two companions, preaching and forming communities of Christians, despite cultural barriers, the opposition of the Jews, the followers of Diana and Artemis, the civil authorities, and even the weather. It doesn't matter if this prayer was written by an acolyte of Paul's in one of the many communities he founded, the thoughts and wishes and experience behind the words is Paul's. Paul lived the life of one rooted and grounded in the love of God in Christ and filled with the fulness of God.

And here we are, now, in this time and culture, hearing Paul's prayer for us; that we might be strengthened in our inner being with power through the Spirit. That we might be rooted and grounded in God's love and that we might come to comprehend the enormity of God's love in Christ. Here and now, with our shrinking, ageing church, in a culture that tells us to keep our religion to ourselves, feeling under-resourced, small and ineffectual. And Paul says, "Your God is too small, your faith is too weak, be filled with the fulness of God!"

God's love is so much bigger, immeasurably bigger, than our small lives and interests and understandings. If you think that somehow, we are the chosen ones of God and God is for people like us; you will never look into the eyes of someone God doesn't love. And if you think the task of sharing God's love with so many people who are different to us is overwhelming; the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine.

We are so used to reading the Gospel stories and seeing ourselves in the confused, stumbling disciples with Jesus as the one with power, demonstrating God's love, that these passages from the epistles come as a bit of shock – the power and fulness of God can be in and with us! And that is Paul's prayer for us. To discover and open ourselves to the Spirit, to the indwelling of Christ, and the wonders of the immeasurable love of God in Christ for all the world. This is Paul's prayer, to move beyond wading in the ocean of God's love and dive into the breadth and length and height and depth of life with Christ.