July 28nd– 9:30am

Springfield Presbyterian Church

11th Sunday After Pentecost

The Height, The Length, The Depth

I. To The Infant Church

 The letter of Ephesians is given to a congregation that is in its very infancy. It is learning what it means to ‘be church’ in new ways. This passage from our lectionary this morning is more of a prayer than any kind of instructional guide. So, that is how we will look at Ephesians today, as a leader speaking to followers, as a parent guiding a child, or as a wise one sharing wisdom.

II. Inseparable

 From the beginning of this prayer, Paul points out the praise that is to be given to God, the same God who is God of every family, every person, every household. Right from the get-go, it’s important to remember that we are part of God’s sacred family, and that we are inseparable from this reality. We are never separated from God’s love, God’s creation, and God’s abundance. Let praise be the beginning of all of our prayers.

III. Moving In

 And then Paul, still moving in a mode of praise, asks and prays that all the people might be strengthened on the inside, that their very souls be emboldened to love and live anew. And in this renewing, in this strengthening, Paul is asking that the Ephesians make room for God in their hearts and in their lives.

 Now, let’s put the brakes on the interpretation for just a moment, because I don’t want to bypass this important part of the prayer. Paul is asking that God moves into our hearts, our lives, our very being that you can’t separate one from the other. But here’s why that’s such a big deal:

 Okay, let’s say you have a guest visitor, who is staying over a few nights. You provide a bed, a warm drink, a comfy chair, maybe a book to read – you offer all the elements of hospitality and for those few days or weeks, you change your patterns so you are hospitable. But, it’s a whole other kettle of fish when you move in with someone, whether that’s a roommate in college, or your wife or husband, comes and permanently moves in. There’s those first few weeks and maybe months where hospitality is rolled out, you do your very best, but there’s a point to which you have to relent and be totally yourself – the good, the bad, the ugly. And, come on, it happens to everyone.

 Here’s a funny marriage spat, but I bet many of us have had something similar. I remember when I moved in with Lorna and I just had the tendency to leave my socks...wherever. That was my way of life – I just didn’t think about it, it didn’t really bother me, and eventually the socks would get to the washer, right? Wrong. Well, kind of. It drove Lorna nuts, and to be honest, that’s pretty fair, and I’d like to say that I’m mostly reformed and put my socks away. When you combine lives and personalities, there’s always going to be something, even if you’re the most adorable couple or roommates on this planet.

 So, then, think about Jesus moving in. Right, because if Jesus comes into your life as a visitor, you can be all really spiritually hippie and lovey and try to show Jesus only the really sweet and kind and lovely parts of you, and hide the parts you don’t want Him to see. But when he moves in, when God takes up permanent residence in your life – woo-boy – God sees the beautiful, the messy, the angry, the joyful, and each and everything in between. To me, the more spiritual person is actually the one who is the latter, rather than the former – to me, if you are so comfortable with God that you let God see all the parts of who you are, the imperfect and impractical– that’s where I think you’ll find some of the most spiritual folk.

 And it’s the completely impractical and imperfect people that I think best represent what holiness looks like in this world. This is slightly off topic, but still hilarious. There’s this pastor, named Nadia Bolz-Weber from the Lutheran church and she put up a tweet about how even though she’s a pastor, she doesn’t really feel spiritual all of the time. She said something along the lines of, “I have what can only be called ‘road rage’ whenever I get in a prayer labyrinth. I’m always like, dude, stop looking so holy, we’re all praying here.” And it’s that kind of candor, and that kind of living with God and God living in us that I find real and tangible.

IV. After the Move In

 So, Paul asks God to move into the Ephesians lives and our lives, in very real ways; to understand, or at least to marvel, at the mystery that is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth of the love of Christ that befuddles us all. The prayer for us is to not miss out on the awe – first of all, Christ is with you always, from the beginning of time, and with you every moment of every day – and that’s an unconditional love that even the most loving human being cannot show you.

 And second, it’s about awe, but there’s also a prayer in there about being humble. Really being humble about the fact that we don’t understand the mystery, and that that is okay, and that is the way it’s suppose to be and to just remain in that awe. Don’t take for a given that the sun will rise another day, do not swear that the trees will bud, do not accept that this life is ours because we deserve it or have earned it in any shape or form. This is God’s love, in real form, each and every day, and to remember it and to know it – no matter if we are having a good, bad, or ugly day – it’s what turns our focus from our humanness to the love and glory of God.

IV. The parting words

 And then, Paul leaves us and the Ephesians, with what I think might be the best part of the prayer – a real encouragement. An acknowledgement that God is working within us and through us and is able to accomplish abundantly more than we could ever imagine or comprehend. And that, I think, is so exciting, as an individual and as a church. Often, we say ‘with God all things are possible’, but it seems to fall on its face. We’re still sceptical in some way.

 But, what if you were to imagine that we, that this church, could be the living, loving, body of Christ out in the world? Well, it always is – so, that being said, how much more can Christ do? This sanctuary has been filled with worshippers since 1836, through different time periods, through different pastors, through all sorts of change – and yet the church remains faithful to God. That’s humbling, and leaves me awe-struck, and excited about who we are and who we will be, formed in God’s image.

 So, this week, may you invite Christ in that door of your heart – yes, it sounds cheesy, I know, but really, what if you invited God in all the beauty and the mess and joy and the sadness and all that life brings? And secondly, may you know and be filled with awe, at the love of God who created us and the love that God has for all of us, and with that, may you not doubt the incredible things that He will do in and through us – may it be your encouragement, your joy, your hopefulness for a bright and beautiful future as the people of God in the world. Amen.