

Ephesians 1:15-23

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. 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, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work 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 age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

God is Looking for Us

Last week, I introduced this sermon series on Paul's letter to the Ephesians as sort of a primer on growing up in Christ, or practicing resurrection. This week, we hear Paul's prayer for this church. A funny thing happens when I'm putting sermons together in advance, especially when I'm using a particular book like Peterson's *Practicing Resurrection* as a talking point. I find a line, either in Scripture or in the book, that I really like, and that becomes inspiration for the sermon title. Sometimes it fits. Sometimes it doesn't. But the beauty is that this discussion to-

day isn't done without God, and God uses us to share his love and wisdom with others. So that's kind of what happened last month when I decided to do this series. In talking about how we have been blessed by God, Peterson encourages us to submit ourselves to this blessing. He writes:

We are immersed in the icy, swift-flowing river of resurrection and come up with all our senses tingling, our imaginations cleansed. We see what we have never seen before. We thought we were looking for God. No. God is looking for us. We thought we were seeking god. No. God is seeking us. This is the first thing: the blessing. We start with God. If we start with ourselves, we wander further into the dark woods. Snow-blind, we circle our own tracks on polar ice.

So you see where the title "God is Looking for Us" comes from now. And I think this is a valid point, but it might not exactly relate to the rest of chapter 1 of Ephesians. And that's okay, because we'll circle back to it.

Our text today, if you were to read it in your Bibles, is a section that is often labeled "Paul's Prayer," and that's exactly what it is. Verse 15 tells us that Paul writes that he does not cease to give thanks for this church in his prayers. That's a lot of thanksgiving, if you understand how central prayer is in Paul's life. Martin Thornton wrote of prayer: "Prayer, quite simply, is the total experience of the Christian man and woman." Hear that again: *Prayer* is the *total experience* of the Christian person. We see this time and time again when we read the epistles. Prayer is not a bookend to Paul's life, Prayer *is* Paul's life. Eugene Peterson puts it this way:

We pray when we are meditatively quiet before God with Psalm 118 open before us; we pray while taking out the garbage; we pray when we are losing our grip and then ask God for help; we pray when we are weeding the garden; we pray when we are asking God to help a friend who is at the end of her rope; we pray when we are writing a letter; we pray when we are in conversation with our cynical and bullying boss; we pray with our friends in church; we pray walking down Main Street in the company of strangers. I am not saying that everything we do *is* prayer, but that everything we do and say and think *can* be prayer.

We should be careful not to limit prayer to the forms and models we have learned. That would keep us in a childhood stage of faith formation. We are taught certain phrases early on: when to say please, thank you, and you're welcome. I love it when I'm with a toddler or a child and I give them something and mom or dad says, "What do you say?" And they answer, "Thank you." It's the cutest, but does the little one really understand the value of "thank you" and its implication of internal gratitude? No. Prayer is the same way. As we grow up in Christ, we learn that everything we think, say and do *can*, and perhaps *should* be prayer. In suggesting that God is looking for us, I think God is looking for us to be in constant prayer with our words, thoughts, and actions.

In our text today, Paul prays that God will give this church five things: wisdom and revelation, an enlightened heart, hope, the riches of his glorious inheritance, and the immeasurable greatness of his power. Each of these gifts could point to how God is looking for us. In

asking God to give us wisdom and revelation, Paul wants us to grow up in Christ. He wants us to have a heart of discernment, a heart full of the knowledge of just how wonderful God is.

He wants us to experience hope in a life-altering way. This one might be a little harder. I think we have a tendency to lean into feelings of hopelessness and despair sometimes, even if on an unconscious level. I was visiting with someone this week, and we were discussing all that's going on in our world—the pandemic, the civil unrest, the wars, the violence, all of it. And at one point she said to me, "It's just all so BIG, Audrey. I don't know what I can do." It dawned on me much later that I could have had a better response, but in the moment, I said, "Prayer is a powerful thing, friend." She responded with, "I do pray. I pray and I pray and I pray." Later, as I was reflecting and praying on our conversation, I realized that what she was saying was a prayer of lament. And it is a perfectly acceptable and holy thing to lament, friends. We have a whole book of the Bible entitled "Lamentations." What I think Paul wants us to understand and know as we practice resurrection is that prayers of lament should also contain glimmers of hope. Seek out the helpers, as Mr. Rogers would say. Find something of beauty in humanity and in creation, and let that give us hope.

Paul prays and asks that we might we might come to know the riches of God's glorious inheritance. God is looking for us to recognize just how much we receive when we are adopted into this big family, friends! This section begins with Paul stating that he has heard of the Ephesians' "love for all the saints." Peterson understands, and I do as well, that "all the saints" refers to this resur-

rection family that we are adopted into upon our baptism. He writes: "We come out of the river of our resurrection baptism, push our wet hair back from our eyes, and look around. There are a lot of people milling around in various states of dampness. Who are these people? Most of them we have never seen before." These people are now our family, part of what we inherit.

The last gift Paul prays that we see is the immeasurable greatness of God's power. When we look at the world and think we are so small, Paul prays, and I pray, that we see just how great and big our God is. It's become sort of a catch-phrase around here, but especially with our Morning Circle, but it's the understanding that God's got this, whatever *this* in your life is. Whether it's what's going on in our world today, or your own personal or family experiences, recognizing God's immeasurable greatness means recognizing that God's got this, friends, and that God's got us.

God is looking for us. God is seeking us out. God wants to watch us grow up in Christ, and practice becoming resurrection people. But we don't do this alone, as I've said before. We don't even just do it here, as a church. Receiving these five gifts Paul outlines is only possible with Christ. Paul tells us four details that fill out exactly how God puts this power to work in Christ:

He raised him from the dead.

He seated him at his right hand.

He put all things under his feet.

He made him head over all things for the church.

These five gifts tell us what we can expect from God as we practice resurrection. God's way of putting this power,

this gift-giving, at work in us is both personal—in Christ—and cosmic—in Jesus raised, ascended, ruling, and head of the church. The beauty of practicing resurrection is that we get to participate in everything that Christ does.

This may feel like a lot to take in, but what it comes back to is prayer. Everything we do and say and think *can* be prayer. Practicing resurrection means seeing God looking for us, and moving in that direction. Practicing resurrection means praying both consciously and subconsciously. When Paul writes that he “does not cease” to give thanks for this church, I think this is constant, subconscious prayer on his behalf.

Have you ever had a person in your life, a friend or a family member, or maybe even someone you don't know personally, who never ceases to amaze you? Like, you just can't figure out how that person is so good, so holy, seemingly so perfect? I think about those people I've known who leave that mark on me, and I often say “That's who I want to be when I grow up.” We know this group of saints that we have the joy of sharing an earthly life with aren't perfect, right? But God, who breathed his very existence into each and every one of us, knows that too, and loves us, warts and all. As we practice resurrection together, God is looking at us with awe, friends. As we grow up in Christ, we become more Christ-like, and see the many abundant gifts that God lavishes on us. God's love is a love that will not let us go, friends. Let that give you hope. Let that fill you with peace. Let that love shine so brightly that people look at you and say, “I want to be like her when I grow up.” Amen.