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Ephesians 1:15-23

Freedom to Open

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Ephesians 1:15-23 New Revised Standard Version

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward 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. 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.

Loving God, Open our hearts. Open our minds. Open our lives to you.

There are certain things in life that you might feel like you aren’t prepared for. Parenting might be one. I remember finding out that I was going to be the parent of a boy and feeling like I was clueless. Sure, I had a girl, but a boy was going to be so much different. They are. On this Mother’s Day I was thinking about how no mother is fully prepared to be a mother. You never feel like you know if what you are doing is right. And you try to do the best that you can and you try to love your child the best way that you know how. Today is a day for us all to hear that you are enough. If you always wanted to be a mother and never could, if you struggle in your relationship with your mother, if you miss your mother, if you feel like you are not a good enough mother, please hear that you are enough. You are loved.

Last August as I prayed about our Perkins Intern coming I didn’t feel like I was prepared. What did I have to share? And I knew that Pastor Stefanie wanted to learn from a woman in ministry, but I didn’t feel fully prepared to say “come, learn from me, I have it all figured it out!” And it has been such a joy to see Pastor Stefanie grow and blossom as a pastor. We are so sad to say goodbye, but we have all been blessed by your presence with us. God’s Blessings be with you Pastor Stefanie.

Now to the world around us, this Tuesday the General Conference for the worldwide United Methodist Church begins meeting in Portland, Oregon for ten days. General Conference is the top policy-making body of the United Methodist Church which meets every four years. The conference can revise church law, adopt resolutions on current moral, social, public policy and economic issues and approves plans and budgets for church-wide programs. I don’t feel prepared to read the news about the General Conference because I worry that the church will not draw the circle wide. I want them to become more inclusive of our diversity but am fearful they will not.

And then I think about our Scripture lesson today that tells me that the Holy Spirit will be with us. Jesus prepares the disciples to be witnesses, to continue to preach the Gospel message, to be Jesus’ body alive in the world. We only have to open our hearts, minds and spirits to receive what God will give.

This past Thursday, exactly 40 days after Easter, was Ascension Day. A day on our Church calendar when we acknowledge that Jesus was lifted up to heaven and is at the right hand of God. Now the disciples and the early Christians did not think that Jesus was the first primitive spaceman, heading off into orbit or beyond into the far reaches of space. Heaven and earth were linked together. Theologian N.T. Wright says we have to understand that heaven is not a location within our own cosmos of space, time, and matter, situated somewhere up in the sky.[[1]](#footnote-2) The disciples had not expected Jesus to be resurrected that Easter morning and spend 40 days with them. It was a second chance, to spend more time with Jesus, to learn more, to listen to Jesus speak about the kingdom of heaven and what that would be like.

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, the disciples kept asking him questions hoping to hold onto Jesus for just a little longer. The last question they asked was about Jesus’ plan to restore the kingdom of Israel. For many years the Jewish people had expected that the Messiah would come and establish God’s kingdom on earth. When Jesus talked about the kingdom of God, the disciples assumed this time of fulfillment was about to come to pass. Israel, as they knew it, would be restored. Everything would be perfect. Mothers would be perfect parents, interns would have perfect experiences, and the United Methodist Church would have a General Conference where everyone treated everyone else with love and respect. A General Conference where we lifted each other up and didn’t tear each other down.

But Jesus didn’t answer the disciples’ question. Jesus said the answer was not theirs to know. Only God would know when the kingdom Jesus was talking about would come to pass. And then Jesus ascended and they were left wondering what to do in the meantime. In this state of limbo when the old ways don’t work anymore, but the new ways don’t feel right either, what are we to do?

Have you experienced a time like that? A relationship ends and you can’t imagine what the future will look like? You graduate from college without a job and no prospects. Your children are leaving home and you can’t imagine what life will be like. A project that consumed you for months ends and you don’t know what to do next. Waiting for a new baby or for a friendship to be healed. Waiting for the church that you love to be better, closer to what God wants it to be.

 In a recent sermon preacher and writer Nadia Bolz-Weber prayed this prayer, “Lord, our country is divided, our families are fractured, our relationships need mending. Convert our fear into love. . . . As your people we will share the pain and then share also in the joy—until the day in which we gather around your throne next to all the people we never thought should be there.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Paul’s words in our Scripture are a prayer of thanksgiving for this faithful and loving community that in the midst of this Christian community the power and presence of God would be disclosed. I pray that God may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know God, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which God has called you, what are the riches of God’s glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of God’s power for us who believe. This is a prayer for insight and vision that these Christians might fully recognize what they have already been given in Christ. They have been given God’s power, riches of inheritance, and what their future holds.

The Holy Spirit is with us, we only have to open our hearts, our minds, and our spirits to receive God. Jesus prepares us to be witnesses, to be able to continue to preach the Gospel message, to be Christ’s body alive in the world. All week I have been singing that Mark Miller song, “Draw the circle wide, draw the circle wide. No one stands alone, we’ll stand side by side. Draw the circle wide; draw it wider still. Let this be our song! No one stands alone. Standing side by side, draw the circle, draw the circle wide!”

 When we experience openness to God in this world, we find glorious inheritance, immeasurable greatness, great power because Christ reigns. Do we have ears to hear this word of grace? Beating back fear, countering despair over evil, Christ is triumphant over all rule and authority and power and dominion, not only in this age, but in the age to come. We know this through faith. We know this through the spirit of wisdom and revelation. We know this through the eyes of our hearts that are enlightened so that we can receive God’s promise.

 In our world we see violence. In our communities we see injustice. We see hunger and need among our neighbors. We see failures and faults in our lives and in all these things we feel powerless. Today, in this moment, God speaks words of power again. In this moment God gives us a spirit of wisdom and revelation that the power of Jesus the Christ may be visible in our lives.

 A preacher friend was sharing with me about her childhood and she said that every night her mother or her father would pray with her as they tucked her in to bed at night. “Dear God, thank you for the honor of being Cheryl’s parents. Thank you for her baptism, which is a sign that she belongs to you and that all children do.” Night after night she would pray this prayer with her parents and the prayer took root in her memory and in her life. Her parents prayed this prayer on purpose. They hoped that she would be reminded of her baptism when she touched water throughout her day. They wanted her to be reminded of some true things about who she is and about God’s world. They wanted her to know that she was loved by God. But not only her, all people. And through her baptism she was linked to God and God’s children everywhere. We are a part of God’s larger family because of who God is in Jesus the Christ.

 God’s love has made us one. That is the good news of the openness of Christ. Christ saves through community. Do you remember the story of the feeding of the 5,000? Jesus provides and there is plenty to go around and some left over. We have enough. We have the fullness of Christ who fills all in all. There is always more of God than we knew or could imagine. And as we move through the joys and struggles of our lives, let us know that what we thought we had learned about faith and the love of God come home to us new and with more power. May we know that we are good enough to stumble through those struggles of life. We are good enough to be great mothers and fathers. We are good to be called children of God. We are good enough to be great interns pastors. We are good enough to be great witnesses to God's love. We are good enough to love our United Methodist Church even if we struggle with some of its decisions. Thanks be to God, Amen.

1. *Acts for Everyone*, chapters 1–12 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/nadiabolzweber/2016/04/1398/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)