

Ain't No Mountain High Enough

Ephesians 3:14-21

For those of you who have heard me speak before, you know I tend to relate Scripture to popular music. Can you guess which song was swirling in my head as I read the selection from Ephesians this week? Of course, it was the Marvin Gaye/Tammi Terrell classic, “Ain't No Mountain High Enough.” You remember the refrain:

Ain't no mountain high enough

Ain't no valley low enough

Ain't no river wide enough

To keep me from getting to you

The son of a Pentecostal minister, Marvin Gaye began singing in church at a young age. No doubt that had some influence on his song writing. I certainly hear it in the lyrics of some of his songs. For myself, as a young teen, the image of a romantic love so deep and compelling was what daydreams were made of. After all, who wouldn't want someone to love them so strongly that no obstacle in this world could stand in their way to keep them from being with their beloved. I'm pretty sure I wasn't alone with that belief, since Gaye's 1967 release of the song made it to No. 19 on the Billboard Pop Chart and Diana Ross' solo release of the song in 1970 skyrocketed all the way to the No. 1 on the Billboard Pop Chart.

When the Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the church at Ephesus, he was not writing about romantic love. He was writing to a church struggling to adapt to a new normal. The Jewish Christians had certain expectations of the new Gentile Christians and vice versa. Paul stressed the need for the two parties to accept that they were now all one in Christ. This theme continues in today's reading. Paul states that he kneels before "the Father from whom EVERY family in heaven and on earth derives its name." There is no division in life on earth, all belong to God. Paul continues that his hope is that all believers will grow in their understanding of this truth. For the church at Ephesus, there in lay the struggle.

How could they know in their heart of hearts what is truly unknowable? How can anyone know just how deep, or wide, or high is the love of Christ? Knowing how difficult this would be for the believers in Ephesus, Paul prays that God would bless them with His Spirit. How could this happen? Paul explains that when believers open their hearts to Jesus, they are then blessed with God's Spirit within themselves. With the indwelling Spirit of God working in the believer, they will become rooted, much as the trees referred to in Psalm 1:

Blessed is the one

who does not walk in step with the wicked

or stand in the way that sinners take

or sit in the company of mockers,

² but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
and who meditates on his law day and night.

³ That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.

It is when we are enriched by Christ in us, that we can begin to comprehend the depth and breadth of God's love for us and then to act out of that love. How many of us though have fully flung open the door of our heart and given Christ full reign in that place?

In her commentary on these verses, Karen Chakoian compares having Jesus in our lives to hosting a houseguest. She writes:

The issue is letting Christ in to change us. Having Christ dwell in our hearts is akin to having a new person move into your household. If they're just visiting, it is all rather easy; you simply offer hospitality and try to practice good manners. But if someone moves in to stay, everything changes. At first you might try to hold on to your familiar patterns and routines, and the new member may work hard to accommodate you and stay out of the way. But eventually they make their mark. Conversations change. Relationships realign. Household tasks increase and responsibilities shift. So it is when Christ moves

into the hearts of Christians. This isn't merely tweaking old patterns; everything changes.

Paul was letting the Ephesians know that now that they called themselves by the name Christian, the name of all families in heaven and on earth, that things had to change. There was no more "us and them", only "us". And "us" were called to live fully in faith in Jesus. But they could only live out this faith, if they fully embraced Christ with their whole lives.

We often hear that the Bible is a living document - that words written thousands of years ago speak even today and Paul's letter bears this out. Millions of people today know ABOUT Christ, but many, within the wider church and even our own denomination, do not truly KNOW Christ. While baptism is the first step into living as a member of the family of God, it doesn't end there. Like Karen Chakoian wrote, things must change within us to accommodate the growing knowledge of Christ and his calling on our lives. And even as we make changes, we are still at a loss to understand fully the depth, breadth, and height of God's love in our lives.

Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is his prayer for us as well. Each of us comes to this place with our own concerns and struggles, our own pain and heartache. Each of us looking to God for hope, for healing, for a sign that we are loved and loveable. Paul seeks for each of us to let the

indwelling Spirit guide us to see what truly is the height, depth, and breadth of God's love for us.

Why is that so important? Because we are God's witness here on earth. If we can't grasp this amazing truth, how can we share the Good News with others? I know from personal experience how difficult it can be to see where God is present in difficult times. I also know how easy it is to forget how God is present with us when we feel we are on top of the world. But He is there and present in all the highs and lows.

If you will allow me, I'd like to bring you a blend of the old and the new to help you remember Paul's message. This is a blending of the lyrics of Marvin Gaye and the commentary of Matthew Henry:

Ain't no mountain high enough, because the unsearchable riches of God are higher than the highest heaven,

Ain't no valley low enough, because these same riches of God reach deeper than hell itself,

Ain't no river wide enough, because the immeasurable love of God is broader than the widest sea,

To keep me from getting to you, for when you fully open the door of your heart, I will enter in.

I close with Paul's benediction to the Ephesians as interpreted by Eugene Petersen in *The Message*:

²⁰⁻²¹ God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us.

Glory to God in the church!

Glory to God in the Messiah, in Jesus!

Glory down all the generations!

Glory through all millennia! Oh, yes!

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