

July 25, 2021

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost  
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH  
Pastor Joel Sutton

Ephesians 3:14-21

PRAY TO THE ONE WHO CAN DO ALL THINGS.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from the St Paul's epistle letter to the Ephesians, the 3rd chapter, which you heard read earlier.

Most likely you have heard it said, or perhaps you have said it yourself, when someone was going through a period of suffering and uncertainty, the empty words as if uttered from a cheerleader rooting the home team on to victory:

*"I'm sending good vibes."*

*"You're in my thoughts."*

*"Stay strong."*

*"Dig deep. You can do this."*

In times of adversity and need, a person doesn't need trite platitudes and inward reflection any more than they need a waterless spring or an empty cupboard. In the midst of your affliction and strife, someone else's good thoughts and vibes are useless. You cannot help yourself digging deep within yourself, because apart from Jesus, you are dead in your trespasses, helpless and hopeless.

In good times, bad times, and at all times, you need God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You need your own prayers and the prayers of others to the One who loves you and gave His life for you. He alone is able to do far more abundantly than all that you ask or think. (cf: Ephesians 3:20) His Word is neither hollow nor void. It is living and active. (cf: Hebrews 4:12) It accomplishes the very purpose for which He sends it. (cf: Isaiah 55:11)

Just as Jesus taught His disciples and the Christian Church how to pray in the Lord's Prayer, (Matthew 6:9–15) in our text, St Paul teaches us to pray as he prays for the Ephesian Christians whom he deeply loves. He had spent nearly three years with them as a missionary, speaking boldly, teaching, baptizing, and proclaiming salvation through Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross. In Ephesus, by the work of the Holy Spirit, what first began as twelve men converted to faith, (Acts 19:6–7) became a large Christian community.

But now, some five years later, as Paul writes his letter, he is bound in chains in prison (cf: Ephesians 6:20) – and – the Ephesians are living in fear and uncertainty. As we heard last week, the Christian Jews were divided against the Christian Gentiles. And if Paul could be arrested for

preaching the true faith, would they be arrested for their faith as well? There were plenty of other religions. Maybe they should return to their old pagan ways when no one raised a fuss?

But Just as God chose you, He had chosen the Ephesians and all people *in Christ* for salvation before He laid the foundation of the world. (cf: Ephesians 1:4) To be *in Christ* is to trust *in Christ* Jesus for forgiveness, life, and salvation. You and all who are *in Christ* are saved, not by your works and deeds, but by God's grace alone, through faith. (cf: Ephesians 2:8–9) Your works are evidence of your faith, but they don't save you. Your God given riches of faith, forgiveness, and salvation come at the expense of Jesus holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death.

Christ came to knock down the wall of division so all mankind would be united into one flock. (cf: John 10:16) There is no distinction. He came to seek and save the lost, from every tribe and language and people and nation. In His death and resurrection, Christ has made peace between God and you... the peace of reconciliation with the Father... and peace between all who are *in Christ*. Christ is your peace. You and all who are *in Christ* are:

***"... members of the household of God,<sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone."*** (Ephesians 2:19–20)

It is for *this* reason, in our text, Paul bows His knees before God the Father in prayer. (cf: Ephesians 3:14) Body posture is important during prayer. It reflects your attitude towards God. To be sure, you may call upon the Lord in any position. The Holy Spirit helps you in your weakness when you do not know how to pray. (cf: Romans 8:26) But standing or kneeling with head bowed expresses humility, reverence, and submission before our holy God.

Paul bows his knees:

***"... before the Father,<sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named."*** (Ephesians 3:14–15)

What is in a name? A rose may smell as sweet by any other name. But there is a huge difference between names given among men and the name given by God. Regardless of who your biological mother and father are and the name that was placed on your birth certificate, you get your Christian identity from your heavenly Father. There is only:

***"one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."***  
(Ephesians 4:6)

In Baptism, He adopted you into His holy family... into the one holy Christian and Apostolic Church. He didn't give you just any name – but He gave you *His* Name, baptized in the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. In the water and the Word, God chose you *in Christ*, wrapped you in the robe of Christ's righteousness, and made you His own along with all who are *in Christ*.

You'll remember that when Jesus taught His disciples to pray. He didn't teach them to pray to "*His* Father in heaven" – but to "*our* Father who art in heaven." Christianity is not an individual sport. No. You are members of the household of Christ, each an individual part of the body of Christ. You are brothers and sisters *in Christ*. And *His* heavenly Father is *your* heavenly

Father. Because He is your true Father and you are His true child, you can pray with all boldness and confidence, asking Him just as you would ask your earthly father.

Apart from Jesus, neither you nor Paul dare come into the presence of God. The sinful man cannot stand before God or even in His presence. But for the sake of Christ, our Lord bids you come. He bids you to come and stand or kneel before His throne of grace and humbly confess your sins. Examine yourself against His good and holy Law. Repent and turn away you're your enmity and strife, jealousy and anger, idolatry and immorality. Other people's thoughts and good vibes cannot heal you. Your own wisdom and strength cannot save you. Flee your uncleanness and cling to Jesus' blood and righteousness. And upon your confession, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Submit yourself to our holy God and pray... calling upon Him in every trouble, pray, praise, and thanksgiving. You were given faith and the Holy Spirit in Baptism. Pray that you:

***"... be strengthened with power through his Spirit... [and] that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith... that you... know the love of Christ... [and] that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."*** (Ephesians 3:16–19)

Your certainty and strength don't come by positive thoughts, good vibes, or your inner strength. No. Strengthened by the Holy Spirit, Christ dwells in your heart through faith. The only way that faith remains alive and strong is by God empowering it through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the giver of life and the Christian's constant source of strength. And the only way that the Spirit empowers your weak and broken heart is through God's living and active Word, whether it is in the read or proclaimed in the Gospel, or attached to baptismal water, or attached to ordinary bread and wine. The Holy Spirit never works apart from God's Word. And where Christ dwells within the heart by faith, then love toward God and love toward one's neighbor will follow. ***In Christ*** you cannot help but bear fruits of faith in works, deeds, and almsgiving, flowing from the love that God, ***in Christ***, first loved you.

As Paul's letter from prison illustrates, God never promised that life on this side of heaven would be free from tribulation, suffering, and even temporal death. It's instructive to notice that amid all the turmoil and fear among the Ephesian Christians what Paul prays for. He doesn't pray for their protection from persecution. He doesn't pray for their good health or reasonable weather. No. All these things will eventually pass away. Paul prays for the one thing needful... the most important thing: That they know and love Christ Jesus!

Paul spent much of his ministry facing persecution and suffering. (cf: 2 Corinthians 11:23–33) He was given a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass him and keep him from becoming conceited. He prayed three times that the Lord would remove it, but God said:

***"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."*** (2 Corinthians 12:9)

As Paul suffers in chains, he fixes his heart and mind on Christ Jesus and prays. Suffering and hardship drives you to give up your false idols and trust in yourself so that you cling to Christ and His work of salvation on your behalf. In Baptism you were united to Christ's death and

resurrection. And just as sure as Christ was raised from the dead, all who are *in Christ* will one day walk in the newness of life. (cf: Romans 6:3–4) As Jesus and the apostles suffered from persecution and affliction, so too, will you and I. Until the resurrection on the Last Day, hold fast and trust in God’s promises, looking forward to the day when all things will be made new. Trust in Jesus and pray. Pray for your family and friends as you pray for yourself. Trust in Jesus as you pray for strengthened faith and forgiveness sins for yourself and other believers... as you pray for faith, and salvation for those who do not believe. Pray along with St Paul:

***“... to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”***

(Ephesians 3:20–21)

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,  
Amen.