

## **Ephesians 3.13-21**

When I was very young, I remember sitting down to watch “Play School”. And part of each episode would be a look through a window – would it be the round window, or the square window, or maybe the triangle?

In our epistle reading today, as we read St Paul’s words to the Church in Ephesus, we are given the privilege of looking through a window into the heart of St Paul; this great Apostle of the Christian Church.

And as we look into the heart of St Paul, I would suggest, we gain an insight into the ministry of St Paul, the prayer of St Paul and the hope of St Paul.

Let’s look at each in turn:

Firstly then, the ministry of St Paul:

“I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory” says St Paul (Ephesians 3.13).

Someone once asked the Duke of Wellington whether Christians should be evangelising or not. The Duke of Wellington asked them, “What are your orders?” “Well, we are told to go and make disciples of all nations” came the reply. “Very well,” said the Duke, “Obey your orders.”

No one could ever accuse St Paul of not knowing the orders of his commanding officer – Jesus, or of shirking his responsibility of fulfilling them.

No, St Paul, knew his commission, to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to build Christian communities (churches).

And he persevered at this task come hell or high water – literally:

“Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night and a day on the open sea. I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles...I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep...” (2 Corinthians 12.25-29)

Yet, says St Paul in our Epistle this morning, all this hardship, these “tribulations” are for “your glory”.

There was a prevailing view amongst some Christians in St Paul’s day, much like the “name it and claim it” prosperity preachers of our day, that said that suffering was a sign of failure, and to be a real Christian meant living every day in bliss.

“If life is tough” such people say, “you are doing something wrong!”

Yet Jesus himself modelled greatness through service and suffering for those he loved, and Paul, modelling himself on Jesus was prepared to do the same.

I find it so inspiring to read the stories of missionaries from days past; setting off from these shores, not knowing whether they would ever return home again; willing to die for the sake of making Jesus known.

C. T. Studd, the Middlesex and England cricketer stands out for me; perhaps because of the cricketing connection!

Studd, famously set off for China to preach the Gospel, and was famous for his saying, “Some wish to live within the sound of church of chapel bell. I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell”.

Not all of us are called to be C. T. Studds.

But we are called to live lives of sacrificial service; following the example of Jesus and St Paul.

And part of that sacrificial service, as the Duke of Wellington reminds us, is to obey Jesus’ command to make disciples of all nations.

Let’s move on to look through the window again at, secondly, the prayer of St Paul.

Ephesians 3.14: “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you...”

Well we might ask how we are to fulfil our commission to make disciples of all nations?

Well, surely the place we begin is on our knees.

The pop group U2 famously sang, “If you want to touch the sky you better learn how to kneel”.

Charles Wesley wrote,  
“Give me the faith which can remove  
And sink the mountain to a plain.  
Give me the childlike praying love,  
Which longs to build Thy house again.”

Prayer was crucial to all Paul's endeavours for Christ, and if we are ever going to achieve anything for Christ, it must be rooted in prayer.

For, as St Paul writes later in Ephesians, "For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 6.12)

And the only way to fight spiritual forces is with spiritual weapons; and foremost of these is prayer.

It's important to note at this what point, what St Paul prays for the Ephesians:  
That they might be "strengthened with might by his [God's] Spirit.  
That Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith.  
That they might know Christ's love for them.  
That they might be filled with the fullness of God.

It's ok at night to pray "God bless mummy and God bless daddy and God bless ... whoever."

It's good to pray for peoples' needs. Philippians 4.6: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

But here in St Paul's prayer we see Paul praying for the "big things" that will make all the difference to the Christians of Ephesus.

If you are ever unsure what to pray for someone, try turning to these verses from Ephesians and praying this prayer of St Paul's.

The third insight from this passage into St Paul: the hope of St Paul.

"Now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end, Amen" (Ephesians 3.20-21).

Paul's hope, above all others, was that Christ might be glorified.

In this passage, and in this context, Paul's hope is that Christ will be glorified through the Ephesians growing in knowledge of Jesus and being filled with the fullness of God.

How might this happening be to the glory of God?

Surely through the Ephesians showing in their lives, individual and corporate, the nature of Christ.

Might I wonder, this vision, this hope of St Paul's give us something to aim for here in Lullingstone – building a community or people that radiates and shows forth the love and nature of God himself?

This may sound like a tall order.

Indeed it is – and we cannot hope to achieve it on our own.

But the hope that Paul holds out to us at the end of this epistle reading is that God is able to do more than we can ever even ask or imagine.

Let us pray:

Father God,

Would you please,

Strengthen us by might with your Spirit;

That Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith;

That we being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, with passeth knowledge,

That we might be filled with the fullness of God.

So may we live selfless lives of service, sharing the good news of Jesus,

Built upon a foundation of prayer,

To the praise and glory of your name.

Amen.