

May 3, 2015 “A Prayer For St. Andrew's” Ephesians 3:14-21

We were very recently visited by our Presbytery. The experience was a positive one. And I mention that because frankly it is not always a positive experience to be reviewed, some would even use the term “inspected” by those who have significant power over us. What do I mean? Well, for starters they allow me to be your minister, and they allow you to have me as minister. Our visitors arrived here, having come to the conclusion already that we love each other. I may be sad that that is an exceptional situation, but I rejoice that I believe it accurately describes our relationship.

At this point I also think we are all aware this is going to be a year with unique challenges. I have never been seriously ill before. I have never before been so aware that I needed your prayers for my well being, at least as much and perhaps more than you need mine. I am grateful for your prayers to date. I give God the glory for answering your prayers and mine, that the cancer is confined to one gland, and that that gland can be removed and in time I can go back to work among you. I do ask you to continue to pray for me. That the surgery is successful in removing all the offending tissue, and that the healing process may take place in a timely fashion.

In a study called Before Amen, Max Lucado, one of my favourite Christian writers, preachers and teachers expands on this brief outline for prayer. God you are so good. I need help. So do they. Thank you. Amen. Be assured that I have hope for recovery of my health and continued opportunity to minister to among you because you have prayed for one in need of being saved from disease. God has heard you. He will hear you again even as you continue to respond to His command to ask, and seek and find.

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I stumbled across Paul's prayer for the church in Ephesus. I see some parallels here. That is why I want to draw it to your attention this morning. Paul was separated from the Ephesians because he was doing what he had to do, following the leading of His Lord and Saviour Jesus. He had gone to Rome. Now he is in prison. I am about to be away from you for 2 weeks because it is time to do what we could not do early in

September when Douglas Allan Irvine passed away. His family, including me needs to celebrate his life, bury his remains and attend to his affairs.

As Paul prayed for his loved ones in Ephesus...the only bond between them was their shared faith in Jesus....I will praying for you. There is but one bond between us, our faith in God, our faith in God revealed in Jesus and with us in the Holy Spirit. One God, world without end. So here is an outline of what I will be praying as I think of you in a far off city. First of all be sure I will be praying for you. There will not a day pass when I will not think of you. I am not trying to be silly about this, I am very serious. In very real ways we are wedded to one another in Christ. We are family. I will think of you and therefore I will take you by name and remembrance before the Lord in prayer. The words of the hymn are true for us... "what a friend we have in Jesus." And here are some of the reasons I will pray for you....

I am aware that spiritual warfare is real. Just as I know that God is real, that Jesus saves, that the Spirit of the Lord empowers his people, I know there is an enemy who continually tries to sow seeds of dissention among us, and to even divide us one against the other. That we have been able to be the happy and loving community of faith that I have experienced, is witness to the fact that prayer has overcome those things that might otherwise done us

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serious harm. I will be praying for you because what I long for is that just as Paul prayed for the Ephesian church, I will pray that God will make you stronger. We never arrive at a place where we do not need greater strength from the Lord.

We will all be challenged by changes that invade our experience. Each one of us. Me too! It may surprise you but I do not like change any more than anyone else. I have never been in hospital for surgery before. Obviously that is going to change. I have never had to spend 4 to 8 weeks out of the pulpit in the last 45 years. That is going to change. I have never had to accept the reversal of roles that comes when you need being ministered unto, as opposed to ministering to others. I am there. That has changed and will intensify. We will all experience change. We will all be in need of helping to carry one another's burdens. We need help. And so do they! Our dear friends across the aisle and across the

world.

So I will be praying for you, to be stronger, more courageous in Christ, than ever before for whatever will come. You know there will be challenges. That God may strengthen you. And that leads to the question, how? How will God strengthen you, and me, and us?

There is only one way that occurs. We do not talk about this nearly enough. And maybe it is even true that it can take a crisis to make us talk about it. Paul prayed for the Ephesians that they might be strengthened with power through God's Holy Spirit. We overlook this simple, but Biblical principle. When there is trouble in our lives, when we are smitten with grief, when illness threatens to reduce us...there is only one way we make it through. God gives His people strength. I hope you remember or recognize that line. It was

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a song lyric written, recorded and performed back in the 1970's by a group of nuns in southern France... "The Medical Mission Sisters".

God gives His people strength. And the way He does that whether we recognize what is happening or not is He pours His Spirit into our midst, literally into us, so that we have His strength. The wise ask for His Spirit to be poured out upon them and into them so that they will be able to do that which the Lord would have us do. I will be praying for you that you might be strengthened, and that in fact accomplished through the Holy Spirit working in you and through you, in your minds and your bodies so that you can do stuff where you would normally say...that's beyond me, beyond my capacity.
Beyond my strength.

What I am really trying to say is I do have an agenda. I have an agenda for you. And this is my agenda: that together we might do what God wants us to do. I understand that we have real limitations. There is stuff we can't do if the only shoulders we put to the wheel are yours and mine. Remember Max Lucado's little prayer? God, you are good. I need help. So do they. And yes my prayer for you is that you might be able to do more than you think you can or even know you can. My prayer for me is that I might be able to do more than I am able to do. How? By the power of God's Spirit in you and around you, in me and

around me, in us and around us and on us together.

My understanding of things is that every good thing that has happened among us, every good moment we have shared has been the blessing it was because that is what was really going on. God was giving us strength to do what was actually beyond our

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capacity. When people say “Wow that was good!” I believe God was and is in the midst of us multiplying our abilities to accomplish, that what we are seeing is God giving us His power to do and to share. That we are seeing the Lord Jesus in our brothers and our sisters and our friends and our neighbours. I promise to pray for you that we might see more of that kind of thing.

Because here is what happens in circumstances like that. When God pours out His Spirit upon us and into us and we are able to do something we had doubts we could accomplish, we begin to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Jesus Christ. Our faith literally grows as we have what we know to be, what we witnessed was, God's power in our midst. When we are convinced as Forest Gump put it so well, “that God showed up,” we are growing in faith and we are growing in strength. For a moment we have taken our eyes off of ourselves and the other people involved and we have seen the heavens open. We have seen God's love for us. And it is bigger in every direction...width, length, height, depth...than we ever thought possible.

The apostle Paul says that to know the love of Christ in that kind of experience is to have surpassed mere knowledge. We read the Scriptures and we study the Scriptures. And we do so in order to learn. Learning involves our minds. I am not saying we should not do that...I have given my life to helping people learn from the Scriptures. But frankly...gaining more knowledge is a cool experience. There is not usually a lot of passion in the learning process. It involves repetition. Drill. There is an old saying...I tells 'em, I tells 'em what I told 'em, and then I tells 'em what I told 'em when I told 'em. Repetition and drilling. To know the love of God in such a way that it surpasses knowledge...that's a hot experience. It

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involves faith but faith that has become passionate. It is more than just

knowing...there is wonder, and awe, and a desire to worship Jesus who is the author and finisher of our faith.

So continue to pray for me. I will pray for you. And to God be glory in the church, and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations, for ever and ever, as long as there is time and beyond it. Amen.

Let us pray;

Lord be with us while we are apart. Help us to be able to taste the unity even though distance will be between us. Keep us safe and give us opportunity to share one another's company once again, in the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.