

January 6, 2019 A Promise To Keep Ephesians 3:14-21

It is important to me, as we begin, a new year that some fundamental things get said. I have an agenda this morning. There are things you need to know, things I may not have told you. Things that are important.

In the portion that I read to you from Ephesians 3, the apostle Paul informs the Ephesian church that he prays for them. You may have assumed it. You may indeed, never have thought about it. I do want you to realize, that I make this as a promise to you and a promise to God about you. I do pray for you. I will include you in my prayers for the coming year. That fact, that I pray for you is not a sign of my goodness or greatness. It is a fact about my faith in Jesus. And when I pray about you and about us, and our being this thing called a church...it is always about this: that we should become what God wants us to be together, to serve HIM first, people whom we meet out there in the Monday to Saturday world, second and each other as a family third.

The order is important. It is about priorities. Not my priorities and certainly not the priorities of The Presbyterian Church In Canada. This is not about seeking that you would become ideal examples of what people in our denomination of the Church Universal should be. It is about what Jesus wants us to be as we walk about, work about, do stuff with others in the midst of a world that is broken because of the reality of sin.

I pray for you first of all, because I care deeply about you. If I did not, I would be retired. There are members of my family, and of my friendship circles, who remind me I am not retired all the time. I pray for you and I pray about you, because I want you to find, and to continually know (faith is really about this matter of knowing); I want you to know that the meaning of life is to grasp that you are a child of God, redeemed by Christ on Calvary's cross, able to do everything that you have to do, because the Spirit of the Living God, God who is real, God who is...is in you. Which is to say the power of heaven is on your side.

If you are anything like me, there are moments when you doubt that God is with you. That heaven is on your side. That the Holy Spirit of God is not only preparing and leading you as you stumble into and through life, but before you and behind you at the same time. Before you because HE is leading you. Behind you because HE really does have your back. We all have moments when we doubt. We doubt whether or not we are able. We doubt whether or not we can bear our burdens. And we all have burdens to bear. We doubt we are strong enough. We doubt that we are smart enough. And the truth is we are not. In so many circumstances we can't. We cannot bear, we cannot carry. We lack the strength, and the smarts. What faith does is this: faith permits us to access the grace of God, the love of Jesus, the power of the Spirit of God.

I pray for you, because I know each one faces challenges and problems I know nothing about. And if I did know your secrets, I probably would not have a clue as to what would be good advice to give. Actually, I am rather selfish. I pray for you, because I need to be prayed for too. I also keep secrets. On my worst days I doubt that I can do anything worth while. On my worst days I am certain you could get better care from any other person whom you might invite to stand where I am standing. I need to be prayed for, for the same reason I pray for you. We have in common the fact that our deepest needs can only be met by the Lord Jesus, in moments of heaven sent grace.

I pray for you, because I know you need God's love, God's strength, God's power, and the continual affirmation that comes of God's presence with you. Well, guess what? I need and I covet your prayers for me, for the same reason.

Before you ask the question...I am not depressed. And I am not considering resigning. And no nothing terrible has happened to my health. I am simply aware of how much you need God in Christ, the support of the church, and the presence of the Holy Spirit. And as we begin a new year.... I tell you....my soul is every bit as needy as yours. So I am telling you, I pray for you. And I am begging you to continue to pray for me, for Barbara, for Rebekah our daughter, and Matthew our son. All God's children have needs. And your greatest need, and my greatest need is to prioritize being God's child first of all. You

need that. I need that. As much as we need water to satisfy our thirst we need to be God's man, God's woman, God's child.

I said I would pray that you would serve God among the people you meet outside these walls Monday to Saturday. It is too easy to get the impression that faith in Jesus is all about us...to put frankly, all about me. It is too easy to make a list of what we want as the children of God as though life were entirely about our own gratification. The fact is, you and I will not see much of one another over the next 6 days. You may see some of the folk who are sitting in this sanctuary more than me, and that is normal. But here is another fact. There are others outside this church circle whom you are going to see a lot more frequently. They may be family members, relatives. In some cases I am sure they are almost life long friends. And as well there are strangers you will meet. People you know very little if anything about.

The Lord Jesus wants you and I to be mindful of those folk, all of those folk, your friends, your relatives, strangers when you have the chance to spend a moment in their presence. I am not saying memorize a Bible verse and dump it on them out there in the world of everyday. I am saying, smile and say good morning. Hold a door open when opportunity affords. Be helpful in any way that suddenly presents itself. Your faith in Jesus was not given to you to make you a "great church person". It was given to you that you might be a good neighbour, and a helpful servant of others. You will know what

you can do to help someone else. You will also know what you can't do. If nothing else you can pray for God's blessing on those you see. No need to move your lips. No need to close your eyes. Think a prayer. And smile. And let God's Spirit have the lead. And don't be surprised if all you get to do is move on.

Work at putting God first. Be mindful of others and do what you can to help them outside this circle. Third: hold fast to this circle, and especially people within this circle who have become like family. People you talk with a lot. People to whom you feel you can open your heart. People whose counsel you have found helpful in the past. The church at its best is not unlike a loaf of bread. Bread contains a number of ingredients, but it is the yeast that causes bread to become the finished product. Here the yeast is God's presence as we worship and work together. Whether we are eating, singing, praying or meeting over a single priority like knitting, setting tables, moving chairs, doing a yard sale, planning something, the Lord whom we meet in worship is in the midst. And will always be where HIS people gather. Whether it is a worship service or some other activity, HE is the reason we find the activity special and personally meaningful.

So here we are. It is a new year. There will be bumps on the road. There will be a storm or two that will be difficult and even painful to navigate. This is life in the real world after all! But it is also life created and ordered by the God who is real, the God who truly saves, and whose Spirit is never farther

away than the precious name of Jesus. I promise...I will be praying for you. I promise to do everything I can to be with you when you need me, when you call for my time and assistance. It's a promise I will keep as God gives us time.

Let us pray.

Lord work in us and among us and with us. Root us and establish us in love. Tend us and send us in your sweet and holy power. Grant that we might know your love which is so much more than head knowledge, so often experienced in the midst of surprising activity. And we ask that YOUR name might receive the glory, the honour and the praise for anything we accomplish that has YOUR blessing. Amen