

# That Christ May Dwell in Your Hearts

Preached on The Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity  
Trinity Anglican Church, WRJ, Vt.  
Sept. 19, 2021  
Text: Ephesians 3:13-21

In the verses leading up to our passage for today, Paul describes how God is carrying out his eternal purpose through the body of believers called the Church. The promised final act of God's reconciling the whole world to himself has begun decisively in the life, death, and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ. What we heard a few minutes ago is really a passionate prayer that reflects this profound mystery. It has been called the boldest prayer ever prayed.

Earlier, Paul has pointed out the fact that God's children have been gathered together in the Church for the purpose of making God's manifold wisdom evident here on earth and in the heavens. So Paul is praying because he is confident that God will prepare us to be fit vessels to carry out his sovereign plan. As he prays boldly, so can we, because our access is based on what Jesus has done for us, "for through Him we [all] have access in one Spirit to the Father." (Ep. 2:18)

If we are members of the Church, we all have the same Father. It doesn't matter whether we are Jew or Gentile, male or female, black or white, rich or poor. We are all God's children and God loves all his children equally. He doesn't play favorites. So when Paul prays, he is praying for all of God's children, including all of us who are followers of Jesus Christ.

Paul is pleading on our behalf that God would grant that we "be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in [our] hearts by faith..." The Greek word for "dwell" that Paul uses here is a word that means to "settle down and be at home." Paul's prayer for us is that we'd be able to do the same thing spiritually with our hearts that most of us already do with our homes—make it a place of permanent residence. These are the terms by which Jesus wants to abide with us.

Even though Jesus wishes to be in close communion with us, Paul's prayer here makes it clear that our lives may not be quite ready for Jesus to settle completely and be at home there. So, the obedient Christian life is really a process of having our lives transformed so that we can become more and more like Jesus and our hearts more fully his home. There are four guidelines to this spiritual maturing.

First, we must rely on God's riches. We must pray with Paul that out of God's glorious riches he may strengthen us with power. When we as finite humans tackle various projects, we are limited to whatever resources that we have available—time, materials, and money as well as physical and mental ability. But the great thing about preparing our hearts for Christ to take up

permanent residence is that we're not dependent on our own resources. As Paul writes, we have access to the glorious riches of God. We read about this from the very beginning of Ephesians: 1) We've been chosen by God and adopted into His family. 2) Jesus has redeemed us from a futile way of life through his death and resurrection. 3) The Holy Spirit lives in us as a guarantee of both present and future spiritual riches. 4) We've been joined together with other believers in the Church for the purpose of revealing God's wisdom both here on earth and in the heavens. And if God has already done all that for his children, he is certainly capable of equipping us with everything we need to prepare our hearts so Jesus can come and make himself at home there.

This brings us to guideline number two. Submit to the Spirit, through his Spirit. We clearly see the Trinity at work here in Paul's prayer. He prays to God the Father, who is the source of the glorious riches and the power that is available to us. And the purpose of that power is to enable us to prepare our hearts so that his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, can come and take up residence. And it is the Holy Spirit who is the conduit through whom that power and those resources flow into our lives. The Holy Spirit has a number of functions in our lives. We've already seen in Ephesians that he serves as guarantee of our future inheritance of the riches of God. But one of his other important roles is to point us to Jesus Christ. He reminds us of the teachings of Jesus and helps us to apply those teachings in our lives. If we want to make my heart God's home, we need to develop the habit of submitting our life to the work of the Holy Spirit. As we read the Bible, pray, and worship in an attitude of humility and submission, we will enable the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives

Third, we must emphasize the eternal in our hearts. We must focus on what is truly enduring. Jesus is interested in living in a heart that truly loves holiness and righteousness. He is looking for more than cosmetic changes. Renovating a house can reveal what previous owners wished to conceal, or just didn't want to think about. It doesn't take much digging to see structural issues that someone hoped to hide. Our hearts are similar. We spend a lot of time making sure that people see only what we want them to see. It is not that hard to deceive others by erecting a pleasing facade. Of course, Jesus is not fooled. He wants us to be truly what we were meant to be. He wants us to be good, wise, and glorious. We can spend all of our time on the cosmetic—and many of us do—but if we don't take care of our hearts, then our spiritual flimsiness will eventually be revealed.

Paul makes it quite clear that the way that we are strengthened inwardly is focusing on developing those things that will last for eternity—our character, thought life, and devotion, rather than those things that will pass away—our bodies and material possessions. This is not to say that we are not to take care of our bodies or be good stewards of our material goods. But our main focus should be on developing those parts of our lives that will last for eternity. It only makes sense that if Jesus is to be at home in our hearts, then that is where we ought to focus our energy.

Fourth and last, we are to trust in God's truth, through faith. When Paul writes that Christ dwells in our hearts through faith, the faith that he is describing is much more than just some intellectual belief. That's certainly part of faith, but it's really only a starting point. If we

want Jesus to be at home on our hearts, we need to have a much more encompassing kind of faith. Real faith will be demonstrated by our actions, those “rooted and grounded in love.” If we want Jesus to come and dwell in our hearts, then we need to have the kind of faith that results in loving him and others. If we do this, God will accomplish what is the very best for us, even when we can’t see how that can be. Here’s how Jesus put it: “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” (John 14: 23) That means when someone wrongs me, instead of trying to get revenge, I forgive and pray for the other person. It means that when I have the desire to engage in a relationship outside of marriage, I repent of that desire, because I want to obey Jesus. It means that I don’t worry continually about my material needs because God has promised to provide them for me.

We have great power at our disposal if we will, as the old hymn says, “trust and obey.” What Paul has been describing is truly magnificent and beyond our present comprehension. Our destiny is to “be filled with all the fulness of God.” (v.19) This is an absolutely staggering promise and one we should hold on to dearly.

“Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.”

*In the Name...*