

June 26, 2022 | Summer Worship Service

TEXT: [Ephesians 3:14–21](#)

TITLE: **Rooted and Established in Love**

By the Rev. BJ Woodworth

We are in a time of transition. We are amidst of a pastoral leadership transition, both now and in the fall when an interim is found. We are transition to summertime, kids are done with school, vacations, summer worship. We are also still in transition from the pandemic, isolation, slower pace, grieving the losses of life, missed milestones, and still wondering and working at what we want life to be like now. Things will never be the same in more ways than I can mention, and we are navigating what life as families, churches, schools, governments, and our economy will look like. We are in a time of cultural transition, where things seem dark, discouraging, and painful. But to borrow from activist Valerie Kaur, perhaps this darkness is not that of a tomb but a womb, and we are in the transition of labor, where in hope new life is emerging, as we labor together.

In these multi-layered times of transition, I felt drawn to reflect with you this morning on the prayers that Paul prayed for two of his churches, that he cared deeply about. At the heart of both his prayers for the church in Philippi and the church in Ephesus I hear a resounding desire on Paul's part as their pastor to experience the revolutionary depths of God's love. A Love that overflows, a Love that roots and grounds us and a Love that has breadth and length and height and depth, that surpasses knowledge.

Questions: How do these images of love strike you? Do they resonate with you? Do they seem foreign and lofty? Too good to be true? Do they stir up in you longing or resistance?

In verse 18, Paul prays that we might *have the power **comprehend** the breadth, length, height, and depth of the love of Christ **that SURPASSES knowledge...***

The Greek word, that we translate “*comprehend*” is so rich, “*kat-al-am-ban'-o*”. It has a more aggressive connotations, like to grasp hold of, to make one's own, to obtain and attain, to take into oneself, to appropriate or to seize upon, take possession of. Very active, gritty, and intense senses.

I pray that we might “have the power to grasp hold of, and make our own, and seize” *the breadth, length, height, and depth of the love of Christ **that SURPASSES knowledge...***

God's love surpasses knowledge! The anonymous 14th century author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* puts it this way, “*God, whom neither humans nor angels can grasp by knowledge, **CAN be embraced by love. For the intellect of both humans and angels is too small to comprehend God, as God is, in God's Self. Rational creatures... possess two principal faculties, a knowing power, and a loving power. No one can fully comprehend the uncreated God with knowledge; but each one, in a different way, can grasp God fully through love.*** (Chapter 4, pg. 42).

God can only be embraced by love, that surpasses our knowledge, our intellect and understanding. We can only grasp God through our loving power, comprehending God's love can only occur through our power to love.

Author, A.W. Tozer says, that most of us who call ourselves Christians have *"substituted theological ideas for an arresting encounter; we are full of religious notions, but our great weakness is that for our hearts there is no one there"* (The Divine Conquest, pg. 26).

Tozer describes this kind of love relationship with God as an *"intercourse between God and the soul"* that can be known *"in conscious personal awareness... as certainly as we know material things through our five senses."*

Questions: How do you know God loves you? How have you experienced the love of God? Where in your body, mind or spirit do you encounter the love of God? When was the last time you perceived or felt the love of God, personally?

There is invitation in God who is Love. God is constantly and continually loving and giving love indiscriminately to each of us and all of us and awaiting our response.

Paul prays that we might have power to take hold of, seize and take possession of that love that is beyond ideas, knowledge, and intellect; there is response needed on our part. For this knowing is not simply opening our minds and taking in; it is a knowing of mutual invitation and influence, a knowing and being known rooted in intimacy and connection. An invitation and a response. If we are to grow in Love, experience Love's depths and have Love overflowing in our lives, we must give God permission to accompany us, know us and be with us.

It's kind of like floating in water

- You cannot float unless you let go, trust, and put your full weight in the water.
- We float only when we stop trying to do so.
- We float when we trust the water to buoy and hold us.
- When we are floating, we become less aware of ourselves and our surroundings.

This is what it is like to encounter, surrender and overflow in God's Love.

Question: Is the water and flow of God's love Safe? Secure? Trustworthy?

Question: What keeps you swimming and striving and trying to float? What keeps you looking up, around and under you?

Even when the water of life seems white, chaotic, and dangerous, do we trust the love of God in Jesus Christ to carry us, support us, not let us down, and take us to where we need to be? These are the real moments of transformation. When life seems out of control, and we are at our worst and our anger, our fears and our nervous systems are

fully activated. Times of transitions can feel chaotic, overwhelming, tiring, confusing and can be hard to trust the flow of Love is guiding us.

It's like **White water rafting** and the need to not try and stand up or swim when you fall out in the white water.

It is exactly at these moments of vulnerability when the Love of God has its deeply transformative and healing power. In fact, I would say most often we need to get to places of desperation, emptiness and brokenness before God's love can abound in us and surpass knowledge. We must seize hold of and surrender to God's love, trusting God's goodness toward us. Our own knowledge can get in the way. **Knowledge gives us a sense of control, mastery and keeps us in charge. Surrendering to Love releases control, enters in unknowing and trust the One who is Love to guide and direct.**

Living in this way, takes practice. It takes self-awareness. It takes courage and risk. It takes vulnerability.

Author David Benner says *"the key to spiritual transformation is meeting God in vulnerability. Our natural inclination is to bring the most presentable parts of ourselves to the encounter with God. But God wants us to bring our whole self into the divine encounter. God wants us to trust enough to meet Perfect Love in the vulnerability of our shame, weakness, and sin. Tragically, most of us have large tracts of our inner world that are excluded from God's transforming love and friendship. It is like going to the doctor for a checkup and denying any problems, focusing only on the parts of oneself that are most healthy. Transformation occurs when we bring all parts of ourselves into the banquet of love provided by our divine host. Our fearful, angry, and wounded parts of self can never be healed unless they're exposed to divine love. This is why we must meet God's love in our vulnerability and brokenness, not simply in our strength and togetherness"* (Surrender to Love, pgs. 78-80).

I do not know about you, but I need someone like Paul to pray for me to have the power and strength and courage to lay hold of and take into myself, that kind of radical love. It is higher, deeper, broader, and wider than I can ever imagine.

And perhaps this is the point, that Paul closes his prayer with? When we are most vulnerable and choose to trust and take into ourselves this Divine Love, it works in and upon us AND...**is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine!**

So, friends as we live through this season of transition where we as a church are vulnerable, let us courageously bring ALL of who we are, especially the parts of our lives and church life that are broken, messy and vulnerable, into the presence of God's transformative Love. So that God can accomplish, in each of us and the collective us, **abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine!** May it be so!