

We offer total praise to the God of our salvation.

Because we were young and now we were older, we've never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed baking bread. Because God has been so good to us and kept us in season and out of season.

God has blessed us with far beyond what we could ever think or ask.

Total praise. Thank you, Lord. Thank you. I'm

willing to square our shoulders and arch our back and say, thank you,

Lord. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord.

Thank you. I

hope we never get too proud and hearty to be able to praise God and to give God glory.

I hope that we don't get too far from understanding that it's not because of who we are.

Goodness of God. Thank you, Lord.

Embodying the call. to love boldly, embodying the call to love boldly.

I pray that according to the riches of God's glory, God may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with through

the spirit and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend.

to understand, to know with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and

to know the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge so that you may be filled with all the

fullness of God. Gracious and holy God, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight. Oh God, our rock and our redeemer, speak God.

For your servant and your people are listening.

525,600 minutes.

525,600 moments so dear. 525,600 minutes.

How do you measure? Measure a year. The lyric from Rent has lingered in the public imagination because it asks a fundamentally theological question. How do you measure a life?

What should we be measuring to quantify whether a life has had sufficient meaning and purpose?

We become extraordinarily skilled at measurement. Oh, we quantify everything.

We measure wattage and output, usage, productivity and efficiency.

The church has learned the language of metrics. We have dashboards and data points and graphs and goals. We track baptisms and professions of faith, worship attendance,

online outreach and online reach and missional outreach and giving trends to measure.

Effectiveness. And there's nothing inherently wrong with that.

In many ways, measurement can reveal whether we are being faithful stewards of the work entrusted to us. Ah, but beloved, I wonder tonight whether there are dimensions of discipleship that cannot

be captured by institutional analytics. I wonder. whether heaven evaluates by a different criteria. I wonder if God is less concerned with how many people are in our pews than whether the wounded

have encountered any healing in our presence. I wonder if God measures not merely how many ministries we've sustained, but whether those ministries embody the expansive love of Jesus the

Christ. Have we ever seriously attempted to measure the breadth and length and height and depth of our love? Have we asked ourselves how often relationship has interrupted resentment?

How often compassion has overcome convenience? If mercy ever operated to overcome malevolence, how often justice was pursued even when its pursuit might lead to punishment.

How often has the church chosen courage over comfort?

The prayer contained in this epistle to the Ephesians is remarkable,

not simply because of what it says, but more so because of what it asserts.

This Pauline author asserts that the church can know Christ and still fail to comprehend Christ's love.

The author asserts that believers can be religious without being rooted.

He asserts that congregations can get together and gather supposedly in Christ's name while still

remaining spiritually specious, dangerously divided and bereft of any kind of love.

And so the author prays. And I can imagine he got down on his knees and he tarried there for a little while. He prayed until he felt things begin to happen. He prayed not for numerical increase, not for institutional prominence, not for cultural dominance, but that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith.

As we are being rooted and grounded in love.

But then comes the why. Why? So that the church may grasp the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ that surpasses everything we think we know.

All of the pedagogy that we picked up at our prestigious institutions. Beyond all.

that was taught us by the degrees hanging on our wall, beyond all of the doctor and doc and PhD and PhD and MD that's behind our names. Do you really know about my love?

Oh, it's a fascinating conundrum. The author prays that we would know what by flesh alone not be fully known. Therefore, he prays that finite minds might be seized by an infinite expression by agape love. He prays that people who are often petty, tribal, self-serving, might somehow become vessels for a love expansive enough to hold the whole world in its embrace.

This is not, it cannot be a sentimental or shallow spirituality.

This is transformational discipleship. The Pauline author is not speaking about mere affection.

We show affection every now and then. And he's certainly not speaking about affectation.

We know how to act. like we love somebody. We do it all the time.

Look at you and say, I love you. And no, we couldn't give a hoot nor holler about you.

Look at you and say, I love you. Wouldn't go out of my way for five minutes for you. Look at you and say, I love you. And you'll be in need and waiting for somebody to pray with you. And they'll pass you on with a smile.

Rather, he is speaking about authentic formation. Not about hospitality alone.

He is speaking about the reconstitution of human community through the power of divine love.

And church, perhaps there's never been a more urgent time for us to hear that prayer than right now. In this season, love cannot remain theoretical.

In this season, love... demands embodiment.

That is why the author of Ephesians does not pray for intellectual mastery, but spiritual strengthening. I pray, he says, that according to the riches of God's glory,

God may grant that you may be strengthened. Get stronger.

Be able to withstand something. Stop being so weak. Stop being so timid.

Stop being so half-hearted. Heart that you would be strengthened in your inner being with the power. Power. Have you ever felt the power of the Spirit?

Have you ever felt the power of the Holy Ghost? Have you ever had the power moved and caused you to move when you didn't know you were going to move? Cause you to speak in a tongue that's not your own. Cause you to throw back your hands and your head and dance in the name of through the spirit. The inner life matters, beloved, because eventually what inhabits the soul manifests itself in public witness. What you talking about, Bishop? A fearful soul produces fearful religion. A resentful soul produces resentful theology.

A shallow soul produces performative discipleship, but a soul strengthened by the Spirit produces disciples capable of sustaining love even in hostile conditions.

And

in case you didn't know, we're living in hostile conditions.

Maybe you don't know because you've got enough privilege that you've been protected.

Maybe you... Because the circles you run in have not yet been affected.

Maybe you didn't know because you still got enough money. You still got enough money to be able to fill your gas tank up and keep moving. Maybe you didn't know because they haven't come looking for

you in your house yet or at your place of employment or at your church yet.

Maybe you didn't know.

But we are living in hostile conditions in a moment where cruelty is increasingly normalized and compassion is mocked as weakness. We are surrounded by a culture being inculcated and indoctrinated into deeper and deeper division. Those who fear unity among the disenfranchised, huh? Those who fear that one day we might get together, huh? The working class, the underclass, the poor, they manufacture misinformation to orchestrate outrage against them. You don't have everything that you think you should have because of those brown people. Your children didn't get into the school of their choice because of those black people. Your track team can't win because there's some trans people on the other track team and you don't understand why.

We're being inculcated and indoctrinated into deeper and deeper division.

And they're doing this while simultaneously inviting us to harden our hearts toward injustice.

I think somebody recently said, oh, they can't fill up their tanks. I don't think about that.

I'm not concerned with that. As long as their coffers are being filled, it doesn't matter. In this high-tech, low-touch era, we are drowning in information, yet starving for wisdom.

Even more troubling is the reality that some who claim the name of Christ have become cavalier, contrary, and even contemptuous toward the actual teachings of Christ.

When somebody can quote something that's not even in the Word of God, and folk recite it as if it's gospel truth,

They are preoccupied with a personal relationship while openly resistant to Christ's command to show mercy. Defiant toward the obligations of justice and suspicious of any theology that says we're all created in the imago Dei. One does not have to search long to find forms of Christianity more invested in preserving power than proclaiming liberation, more concerned with punishing outsiders than welcoming the stranger. And I must confess that my spirit grieves deeply when I witness a nation of immigrants torturing immigrants in the name of an immigrant Jesus.

I'm going to say that one more time. I must confess that my spirit grieves deeply when I witness a nation of immigrants torturing immigrants in the name of an immigrant Jesus.

The

audacity. Unmitigated goal. The moral contradiction is staggering.

We worship a savior whose family fled political violence as refugees, yet we harden our hearts against those today, right now, in our time, seeking the same kind of safety.

We proclaim a gospel centered on hospitality, yet we construct policies and postures shaped by hostility. We sing about grace on Sunday while consenting to systems of day. on Monday.

And far too often the church has accommodated these contradictions.

That accommodation is not merely unfortunate, it is pernicious.

Because once the church loses its moral clarity, once discipleship succumbs to anticipatory obedience and capitulates to empire, The witness of the gospel is lost.

The church at that point ceases to be a prophetic community and becomes merely another institution bowing at the altar of power, prestige, and evil.

That is why the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer remain so piercingly relevant. Bonhoeffer wrote, we are separated from one another by an unbridgeable gulf of otherness and strangeness, which resists all attempts to overcome it by traditional means. There is no way from one person to another. Christ stands between us, and we can only get in touch with our neighbors through Christ. What Bonhoeffer understood is that left to our own devices, we always organize ourselves into categories and camps. We sort people into worthy and unworthy, neighbor or stranger, insider and outsider, citizen or three-fifths a human being,

ha ha ha, gay or straight.

And then we sanctify those distinctions with religious rhetoric. Be careful. of the sermons you hear. Be careful of what some people who put rev in front of their name are trying to feed you right now. Know the word of God for yourself. Read the word of God for yourself. Study it and analyze it. What did Jesus say? What did Jesus teach? What did Jesus go to the cross for?

You just can't be fed any kind of meal and think that it's wholesome for our spirituality.

Christ stands between us. In Christ, the immigrant is not first stranger.

They are our brothers and our sisters, our father who art in heaven.

The poor are not social burdens. They are the least of these from Matthew 25.

And as you've done unto the least of these, you've done unto me. The incarcerated are not disposable nor perpetually marred by their mistake. They are souls worthy of a second chance.

The suffering are not invisible. They are the visible face of God.

Loving deeply requires the kind of ophthalmic orientation because when we refuse to see the image of God in others, we prepare our hearts for violence. Racism.

genocide do not begin with weapons, but with a failure to love.

And if we tell the whole truth, that kind of love makes us uncomfortable.

Because loving like Christ requires surrender.

An individual once said to Marcellus Bareheart Williams, a trained shaman, of the Muskogee Nation Creek tribe and an ordained Baptist minister.

He said, I wish I had the same amount of spirit that you have.

To which Williams replied, we were all given the same amount of spirit.

None more, none less. The difference between individuals is whether or not you allow the spirit to have more of you.

That is so often the fiend posture of the double-minded disciple of James 1, 8, beloved. If I had more spirit, I had more courage.

If I were as brave or committed or bold as you, I'm...

able to vote right. I might be able to live right. I might be able to serve right.

I might be able to teach right. I might be able to resist right. But I just don't have as much as you have. Beloved, that is the cry of the cultural conformist. The issue is not whether God is withholding the spirit from anybody. The issue is whether anybody's willing is withholding themselves from God's spirit, whether they are willing to yield enough. their pride, their privilege, their station, their self-interest, their wealth, for the spirit to transform them from the inside out, for the spirit to make them capable of radical love.

That's why that old hymn asks, is your all on the altar of sacrifice laid?

Sometime we need to stop singing them 7-Elevens and

we need to get back. To the hymnody that really asked us some deep questions.

The hymnody that had some theology in it. The hymnody that you had to wrestle with.

And they didn't ask that question because God delights in deprivation, but because transformation requires surrender. We cannot cling to supremacy and claim to practice servanthood.

We cannot nurture resentment and embody reconciliation.

We cannot protect our comfort at all costs and claim to follow a crucified Savior.

God does not remain distant from the suffering.

God does not remain distant from the suffering.

God enters it. God inhabits it. God is in the detention facilities where they're being served rotten food, where they're being raped, where they're being beaten, where they're being allowed to die.

God is in the detention facility. is in the communities being dismantled by gerrymandering.

God is in the war-torn areas across the world. God is with transgendered individuals being tracked and traumatized. We don't start tracking folk unless we intend to exterminate folk.

We've lived it before. The Red Scare. We've lived it. Put their names on a list so they're easy to identify, easy to find, easy to exterminate.

And if God is found among the suffering, then the church cannot distance itself from suffering without distancing itself from God.

The church cannot merely offer commentary while avoiding costly engagement. We cannot become theoreticians of justice without becoming practitioners of mercy. The world does not need more ecclesial technicians skilled at institutional maintenance while remaining emotionally detached from human pain. The world needs disciples whose faith has become flesh, disciples who walk the talk, disciples whose theology sees and embraces and serves because the application of the instruction matters. Huh? of the instruction matters we have enough information we don't have nearly enough transformation the application of the instruction matters we are only one full generation removed from systematic legalized injustice within these United States of America. And what we know is that justice was not simply given to our forebears.

Rights were not passively secured. Constitutional victories were not ceded.

No, our mothers and our fathers and our grandmothers and our grandfathers who were deeply rooted in Christ applied their faith and moved their feet.

They applied their faith and moved their feet. Even while the clubs were being wielded and the hoses trained, even while the dogs were being loosed and the tear gas sprayed, even as they were attacked and arrested, they persisted. I wish it were otherwise, but these days are upon us again. And where is the church?

Why are we so silent? What are we afraid of?

To whom have we pledged a deeper allegiance than the covenant of our baptism?

As we look at the world, we must always ask, does my work, do my social networks, does the platform that I support, the group I fund, contradict my baptismal vows?

We don't get to compartmentalize our lives. We don't get to say that we will stand against evil in whatever forms it presents itself and then support somebody who does nothing but practice evil on a daily basis.

Oh, and I'm going to ask you right now. Save your emails. Save your letters.

Don't send them to me. I don't want them. Just look at the news. Read the New York Times.

Watch YouTube. Watch CNN. See what he says. See what he does. See what the Supreme Court is doing.

Don't write me unless you can prove that the evil is not among us.

And I want to see you do it.

The application of the instruction matters. Our Pauline prayer was never intended to remain abstract. The breadth and length and height and depth of divine love are meant to become visible in the life of the church. Love is authenticated through practice, through presence, through proximity, through persistence, through the difficult and often exhausting work of refusing to surrender our humanity in an inhumane world. And this, beloved, is the invitation.

before the Baltimore Washington Conference, not simply to conduct business, not simply to celebrate accomplishments, not simply to survive another year of institutional uncertainty, but to become more deeply rooted in Christ and to be in bolder love with all of creation, to become practitioners rather than mere professors of faith. To allow the spirit to have more of us. Because when the spirit has more of us, something holy begins to happen.

Mercy does interrupt resentment. Truth unsettles deception. Courage confronts corruption.

Compassion refuses indifference. Communities once divided discover the possibility of reconciliation. This conference helped to lead the way for more than two. people to gather in faithful resistance to injustice toward the immigrant. And then we march to the halls of Congress to hold our elected officials accountable.

People who had nearly given up hope, when we live like that, when we live like that,  
encounter signs that another world is possible under the reign of God.  
So the question becomes, after another 525,600 minutes,  
will we have embodied a deeper love? The question becomes whether we have formed deeper  
community  
in spite of our indifference, whether we're willing to sacrifice, become more committed to justice,  
more surrender to the spirit, more reflective of Christ. Because in the end, beloved, reports will  
be archived. metrics will be forgotten. Titles will disappear.  
Debates will fall silent. Buildings will crumble and institutions will fade. But what will be the  
fruit of bold love. was willing to reach and heal and transform a wounded world.  
May it be said of us that in an age of cynicism we chose compassion. In an age of cruelty we  
practiced courage. In a season of capitulation we remained rooted in Christ.  
In an age of fear we chose bold fierce love.