

The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
July 25-26, 2009
Ephesians 3:14-21

“Little Is Much in the Hands of the Lord”

My brothers and sisters in Christ, I spent much of this past week in Orlando, Florida – not at Disney World, but at the National Hispanic Ministry Convention. It was a great blessing for me to attend this event, most of which was in Spanish but with English translation. God is doing amazing and wonderful things in his Church to reach out with the good news of Jesus to Hispanic people. As a non-Spanish speaking Anglo, I thought I would probably stick out like a sore thumb and wouldn't fit in very well. But the reverse was true: I was welcomed with open hearts and arms and was warmly received into this fellowship of the saints. I met some very interesting people who are the hands and feet of Spanish language ministry, including David – a native born Korean who felt called by God to serve the needs of Spanish-speaking people. At first, it seemed kind of strange for a Spanish-speaking Korean to be involved in this ministry, but our gracious God works in mysterious and wonderful ways. I also met Erich, an Anglo Director of Christian Education (DCE) who grew up in Guatemala, the son of LCMS missionaries. Erich grew up speaking Spanish in church, school, and community, but his family spoke German at home. It wasn't until Erich attended Concordia College in Seward, Nebraska that he really learned English. And I also had the privilege of spending time with Pastor Pedro Lopez, the candidate who has been extended the call to serve as Spanish Language Mission Developer. We welcome him and his wife, Francisca, and their children: Alex, Eddie, Jacqueline, and Mark. They are among us for a visit to become better acquainted with the mission field here in northern Virginia. I take this opportunity to invite everyone to a dinner-fellowship evening here at church on Tuesday evening beginning at 6:00 pm in the Fellowship Hall where we'll spend some time with the Lopez family. In all of this, we ask the Lord's continued guidance and blessing upon this mission endeavor. As I've mentioned before, in many ways, we are laying a foundation here, and at the beginning this can seem rather small, but little is much in the hands of the Lord. That's the theme for today's message: "Little Is Much in the Hands of the Lord," as we continue our summer preaching series, "Walking by Faith." Today we focus especially on Paul's closing words in today's Second (Epistle) Lesson: **“Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”** (*Ephesians 3:20-21*). May the Lord's rich blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word, for Jesus' sake.

Today's Second Lesson from Ephesians 3 forms one very long sentence in the original language. Paul seems to like these complicated run-on sentences that work much better in the original Greek than they do in English. Actually, Paul outlines three prayer requests here in these verses before his final doxology in verses 20-21. These requests are like a musical crescendo that builds up to a triumphant final song declaring God's power and glory. Please take out your worship bulletins and look at these verses. First, prayer request #1 in verses 16-17 Paul prays that **“... according to the riches of his glory, he [God] may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.”** Strength in our inner being through the indwelling of the Spirit – that's something each and every one of us needs at all times and in all places. The temptation is for us to rely on our own strength, our own resources and power. When we are young, when we have money in the bank, when we have our health, when there is no struggle or heartache, we think we have everything under control in life. We deceive ourselves, and it doesn't take much for it to be clearly revealed that whatever strength we may

have is pretty weak and puny. God may test us in order for us to learn that it is his strength, not our own, that will see us through. As the psalmist writes: **“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”** (Psalm 46:1). When all of these outward signs of strength are removed: youth, money, health, prosperity, what is left? By God’s grace, that is when the real treasure is revealed: the treasure of faith in the Lord and his strength. This alone is what enables us to be strong, to persevere and remain steadfast unto the end. As Paul writes of God’s reply to him about his own “thorn in the flesh: **“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”** (2 Cor. 12:9). In our weakness, God’s strength is revealed. And nowhere is that weakness more clearly revealed than at the cross. Here, in the suffering and death of Jesus, weakness is transformed into strength; sin is overcome by grace; death gives way to new life. In the weakness of our own failures and sinfulness, the strength of God’s power to forgive, restore, and renew is freely given to all at the cross through Jesus. For us to be rooted and grounded in love, we come to the cross.

Prayer #2 from Paul is found in verses 18-19: **“I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge...”** It’s almost as though Paul is trying to come up with some kind of measurement or calculation to help us grasp in some small way the dimensions of Christ’s saving love. How do we get our minds around this? The limitations of flesh and blood fail us here. We can only receive this gift and know that it surpasses anything we can possibly grasp, and sing our praise with thankful hearts: **“O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!”** (Romans 11:33). Finally, prayer #3 from Paul is found at the close of verse 19: **“... so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”** This is an incredibly bold prayer request. Elsewhere Paul writes of Jesus: **“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell”** (Colossians 1:19). Paul’s prayer is that even as the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in Christ Jesus, so may that same fullness now by God’s grace dwell in the lives of believers. And that is why we are here today: so that through his life-giving Word and Sacrament we may be filled up with the fullness of God.

God’s Word read and preached, bread and wine received, water poured out on the heads of individuals may not look like much in the eyes of the world, but neither were the five loaves and two fish that the little boy brought to Jesus. Little is much in the hands of the Lord. **“Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”**