

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Ephesians 3:14-21)

Immeasurably More than You Imagine

It was my first year at the Seminary when I had this opportunity to go on an immersion trip to learn and, for a couple of days, to work with one of our WELS churches in Mexico. I had put in the extra work, extra hours, and saved up extra money so that I could enjoy this trip. Everything was going very well. That is, until one day I went to the bank and my card was nowhere to be found. I ransacked my room. I dumped out my bags. I flipped over the mattress and dug through drawers. I searched high and low at the school but my card was nowhere to be found. So there I was in Puebla, Mexico, over 2000 miles from home, in a foreign country, with only a few pesos to my name. So what if I had money sitting in my bank account? I could not access it and, therefore, could not use it. Thankfully, my fellow seminary friends helped me and everything worked out fine.

We are foreigners and strangers in this world. At times it feels like we are searching all over the place for answers, running over here, searching over there, to have access to a happy and enjoyable life. But unlike my debit card that I never did find, you already have access to enjoy the life God has given to you. Don't worry, this isn't something that you have to search out for; it's been revealed to you. You don't need to start flipping over mattresses and digging through drawers to find it. What Paul prays for the Christians in the city of Ephesus and the surrounding regions already belongs to you. And so with Paul we bend the knee to our heavenly Father and prayer, **“That out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,”** (v.16).

God did not skimp out or leave some in reserve. From His own riches He pours out the Holy Spirit generously through the washing of the water and Word in Baptism. And, still, Paul prays (and, therefore, we pray) that God pours out even more to strengthen our inner being. Why? Because our focus is so much more on the outer being, the physical of what we feel, see, and touch. Think about your prayer life: how many of

your prayers focus on health and well-being? On finances and extra comforts? On relationships? On things we need or want for daily life? Don't get me wrong, it is not wrong at all to pray for those things. All of these physical things we pray for in the Lord's Prayer with the one petition, "Give us this day our daily bread." But in our human weakness we seem to forget there are still six other petitions all dealing with our inner, spiritual being.

Imagine if we had more of the Spirit to resist sin and temptation in our lives how much our consciences would be at ease. Imagine if we had more of the Spirit to focus on things above and we wouldn't get wrapped up in, often times, such trivial matters. Imagine if we had more of the Spirit so that when we prayed, "Thy will be done," we would also be willing to accept God's will even when it doesn't go according to our plans. Imagine the joy we would have in life and peace in our relationships. The thing is, you already have all of that in Jesus. And still we pray for more! Imagine that!

Paul prays so that, **"Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, (v.17).** Through faith that God creates in your heart, Christ has set up his kingdom within you. By nature I wasn't just a run-down old building. I was inhabitable in sin. I didn't want anyone to move into me. There were not any qualities about me to entice any future buyers. I was dead and condemned. Then here comes Jesus who demolishes that old sinful house and raises me a new creation. He has formed me in his own likeness in Baptism and has taken up residence within me. And then he uses me as a base of operation to share His love in this world. What love!

It's that love of Jesus that is your foundation and root system in life. When the winds of this world come howling, avalanches of trouble threaten to crush you, and earthquakes of problems shake you, Christ's love secures us to stand firm. As the temptations try to pull us away and Satan's lies and empty promises entice us, it's Christ's love that keeps us rooted to him. Imagine if we had a better handle on Christ's love. Imagine the weight that would be lifted off our shoulders, the confidence and freedom we would have as we face all the responsibilities, troubles, frustrations, short-comings, and failures. Imagine how much less lonely we would feel knowing better that Christ's love cannot be taken away. Imagine how much more patient and forgiving we would be if we had better grasp on how patient and forgiving Christ is with me. Imagine how much less selfish we would be if we had a better grasp on Christ's selfless love.

Imagine it because you will never get to the end of how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. Imagine it. Why would he come to this world that is so broken and only getting worse? How could he choose to submit himself to the Law over

which He is Lord and Master? Why would he claim my lack of love to be his own? How could he choose us who are often so busy doing our own work trying to appease our own consciences? How could he not be ashamed of me when there is so much I am ashamed of myself? How can he choose to be patient with me and forgive me again? He knows full well I could never begin to pay him back; then he doesn't want me to either, how? How could he want to take my place, receive my due punishment, die my death not for himself but for my good? Then he's still thinking about me when he rises again in the flesh and blood on Easter morning to erase any doubt in my mind that my sins are forgiven and I have peace God. He returns to Father in heaven in the flesh and blood to prepare a place for you because he wants you and me with him forever. And until then he waits, patiently, for the time to come. He makes me a lord in this world so everything works for my good, your good, for the good of his church. He invites me to a feast, a heavenly banquet of bread and wine where I receive his body and blood to strengthen my weak self and forgives my sins to keep me in the one true faith until I will be with him. Imagine that! How? Why?

Because you are his bride. On his wedding day, a groom sees his bride walking towards him and his joy is so contagious at the sight of his bride that everyone else can't help smiling with him. That's Jesus with you. Nothing else brings him as much joy as seeing you. He sees one he chose before the creation of the world. He sees you who he washed with his blood and removed every stain, wrinkle, and blemish of sin and its shame. He looks at you and sees the crown of the Lord's splendor. And he rejoices because you are his own.

And so we pray that we might know the love of Christ knowing full well we will never fully grasp it. It's too wide and long and high and deep! And still we pray for more so that, **“you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God,”** (v.19b). If this all didn't sound impossible before, it certainly does now. This is the end goal: that you might be filled up with the one who cannot be contained. God fills so fully and completely that he is with you wherever you are, whatever situation you might be in, and has given everything back to you for your good and for you to enjoy so that even in the face of suffering we can rejoice. Just imagine it!

Remember me stuck in Mexico without access to my account? Here we are, foreigners and strangers here in this world, with all these riches that God has given to us already in our possession, but we fail to access it because we try to put God into a box deciding what he is or is not going to do. Either we think that our requests are too small or we fail to imagine what God is capable of doing for us. Just imagine it! He's not some genie that can only grant you so many wishes. He's more. He's not a glorified butler who is only there for your beck-and-call and convenience. He's here today. He's not a vending machine that we need to put in some “Good Work Coins” so that he might do good for

us. He gives to us from his glorious riches, fills us with his fullness and in the face of our doubts Paul assures you God is **“able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,”** (v.20).

I heard a wise pastor once say that the problem for Christians is that we ask too little of God and doubt too much. Imagine it. The same God who creates life from nothing, gives me life with him. The same God who made the sun stand still for his people is intricately involved in every second, minute, hour, day of your life. The same God who takes a small snack to feed thousands of people, opens his hands and satisfies the desires of every living thing. The same God who turns water into wine to celebrate and bring delight at a wedding, wants you to enjoy life and celebrate with him. The same God who stands at the grave and a dead Lazarus walks out alive again, stands with you at a funeral to assure you that he has defeated death and the grave. These aren't just neat stories to tell children. They are historical facts that show us our God who is able to do immeasurably more than we can imagine. It's that same God who is at work for you and within you!

Imagine it. The life of a Christian isn't dull. No, you get to really live set free in Christ from trying to fill the empty void, to solve the next problem, to try and impress that person, to get ahead! You are filled the fullness of God! You have the Love of Christ! You have the Spirit who strengthens you to see with Mary that Jesus operates according to his own timing and his own way. And in Jesus you have access to it all! Use it. Grow in it. Keep going back to it for more. So we bend our knees in prayer to the Father with confidence that he is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever. Amen.