

“A Hymn to Christ”
Ephesians 3:14-21

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I've been visiting with my family this past week. Every year my mother rents a summer cottage in Madison, CT. It is a lovely time to be together – a time to swim, wander through the rocks to look for hermit crabs, read, play games or just hang out. Every night we gather around a large round table to eat a simple summer meal. We begin by singing grace – the same simple songs of grace that we sang as children. It is fun to discover each year which of the younger grandchildren learned the words over the winter and can now sing with us. These moments of grace are a simple way for us to pray together, but they're also a way to teach the children about the glory of God. As we delight in our time together as a family, singing grace is an easy way to remember to celebrate the glory of God who dwells among us.

We find a similar situation in our text this morning. Paul is writing to the church in Ephesus. He has come to the end of one part of the letter and writes a concluding prayer in praise of God and Christ as a way of ending his thoughts. This is a beautiful prayer. One of those texts worth memorizing if you're interested in scripture or just want an activity to keep your mind sharp and fresh. I'm not the best at memorization, but if I could, I'd memorize this prayer. In it, Paul touches on the glory of life – the glory of God – the importance of a strong interior spiritual life – and his yearning for those who are reading or hearing the prayer to know the depth and breadth of the majesty of God. Listen to a few of the verses again. Paul writes:

I pray that, according to the riches of his (God's) glory, he may grant that you 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. 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, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:15-19

I just love this last line: *“I pray that you may have the power to comprehend ... what is the breadth and length and height and depth ... so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”* Paul fully captures his feelings for God in these words. His heart is aching with the knowledge of God's love so he names what he is feeling. He wants us all to know the breadth and length and height and depth of the God who lives among us. Poets, theologians and people of faith have spent centuries trying to write about these feelings – trying to convey this breadth and length and height and depth of God.

The same is asked of us. How do we put our experiences of God into words? How do we name our feelings for God? How do we honor all that God is and how grateful we are that God calls us to be God's children!

The other day I came across a poem written by Mary Oliver. I thought this was fitting because over the 4th of July weekend, the New York Times wrote an article on Mary Oliver naming her "The Bard of Provincetown." Since the 1960's she has written poems naming the beauty of God's creation. With remarkable simplicity she observes the glory of God and names it through common images. One friend, a fellow spiritual director, once said: "Oh, the poems of Mary Oliver are the new scripture." The poem I stumbled on the other day is titled: *Why I Wake Early*.

Why I Wake Early
Mary Oliver

Every day

I see or hear something

that more or less

kills me □

with delight,

□that leaves me

□like a needle

□in the haystack

□of light. □

It was what I was born for---

to look, to listen,

to lose myself

inside this soft world---

to instruct myself

over and over

□in joy,

□and acclamation....

Mary Oliver hits the nail on the head when she says: “It was what I was born for --- to look, to listen, to loose myself inside this soft world --- to instruct myself over and over in joy, and acclamation ...” As people of faith, we are invited to do the same thing – to look, to listen, to lose ourselves in the glory of God.

Sometimes these moments of awe happen just because we’re in the right place at the right time. In March, my mother and sister attended the memorial service of a close family friend, Fenno Heath. I would have been there, too, but it was the weekend of our Women’s Retreat so I could not attend. For many years Fenno was the conductor of the Yale Glee Club so his service was held in Battell Chapel at Yale. My sister Kitty said the Chapel was filled with members of the Glee Club from the years and years of Fenno’s conducting. At one point during the service everyone stood to sing the hymn *Be Thou My Vision*. When Kitty was telling me about this moment in the service, her eyes filled with tears as she said: “I wish you could have been there. You should have heard it – a thousand voices singing *Be Thou My Vision* in harmony. It was some thing other worldly – awesome.” It was a moment of experiencing the breadth and length and height and depth of God.

Having these breathtaking moments changes our lives. That is why Paul prayed that the Christians in Ephesus would experience the expansiveness of God. These moments help us to understand that life is so much more than hard work and sadness. Life is about noticing God’s glory – glory that fills our hearts to the brim with wonder and awe.

I was ironing the other day. I must confess that throughout most of my life ironing has not been one of my favorite domestic tasks but as I age I’ve learned to enjoy it. I find it peaceful to iron out wrinkles and smooth out rumpled cloth. I iron in my kitchen near a large window that looks over my garden. As I stood there bent over a pillowcase or some such thing, my eye caught a fluttering movement beyond the window and I looked up. Once again I spotted a hummingbird feasting on the juice of the red bee balm that has recently bloomed. Perhaps it was the same bird as last year, I don’t know. But it’s movement and the way the garden looked took my breath away. It was so glorious, so mysterious I had to sit down to take it all in – to enjoy the breadth and length and height and depth of summer glory. Because of the rain that we’ve had the garden is blooming all at the same time. There are white and yellow Shasta daisies, black and yellow black eyed Susan’s, yellow and pink and orange lilies, purple thalictrum, white and pink and rose colored astilbe, lavender balloon flower, yellow coreopsis, moss pink phlox, yellow, orange and pink zinnias. Behind the garden the maple trees swayed in the wind and the maples leaves, now deep summer green, were blessed by dappled sunlight. It was all so glorious it made my heart ache. It was a moment of blessing and grace.

In that moment, Paul’s yearning became my yearning. I pray with Paul that we may all know the fullness of God among us. His words are my words to you: *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 surpassed knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

May God be with us on our journey. Amen.

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