

**“Into the depth”**  
**Sermon on Sunday, July 25, 2021**

C. S. Lewis, the great English philosopher and Christian writer, once said: *“The moment you wake up each morning, all your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists in shoving it all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other, larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in.”*

How do we begin to pray? Today’s reading gives us a clue. In Ephesians 3, we find not only one of Paul’s deepest prayers, **but one that leads us into depth**. It stands apart from most people’s conversations with God. It’s NOT a litany of requests - and I am quite convinced that Paul, just like us, had a list of important wishes that he could have easily brought to the Lord’s attention: “God, get me out of prison...”; “Lord, protect the church from division...”; “Heal this person; bring sanity to that person!” No, that’s not what he focusses on. Instead, this prayer implores the growth of our inner spirit, our understanding of God’s unlimited resources of love, the depth of our spiritual lives. How deep can we go? How close can we get to our creator?

The answer is: just like the universe itself, which, as we understand it today, has no outer boundaries, there is no limit for how deep or far we can go in our relationship with God. It simply depends on us, but I shouldn’t say “simply.” The most significant limitation to our spiritual growth is the same darned old thing. It’s called “I”. Our inner resistance, our ego, our emotional injuries are notoriously in the way of our relationship with God. In terms of growing closer to God, we famously stand in our own way, we create our own shadows and stumbling blocks and grievances and resentments. Through prayer and contemplation, through the yearning of our souls in prayer and the reception of God’s love and grace, we can be liberated from the adversities inside of us. That’s the path Paul suggests to his beloved people in Ephesus, and it is still the path he would recommend to you and me today: the path leading into the depth of Christ inside of us. Once we take that path, we will discover the footsteps of brothers and sisters from the past; we may come across the marks of spiritual people from other religions. We will be in good company. But let us focus on Paul’s prayer.

Our American President Abraham Lincoln once remarked: *“I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom, and that of all about me seemed insufficient for the day.”*  
Honest words from an honest man!

Paul begins his prayer kneeling. *“For this reason I kneel before the father...”* Kneeling while praying is less common today; some people find it antiquated and avoid it altogether. But it can be a helpful practice, if your knees allow you to do it. In kneeling, we say, “God, I confess that you are in charge, not I.” It’s an expression of humility and trust. Kneeling, Paul implores God to broaden the spiritual pathways of his people.

*“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”*

Right away, we are in touch with generosity. There is nothing stingy about God, nothing that rations our development or prevents access to all the resources of heaven. Paul says: these resources are there for us all of the time, we just need to tap into them. And once we find access to that source of spiritual life in prayer, it is literally infinite. Only our pride and ego may prevent us from receiving it. Christ will happily dwell in our hearts if we empty them of our agendas.

Paul continues: *“And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 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, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”*

If this passage sounds ecstatic, well it is! We don’t have words that can describe the extent of love that we will eventually encounter in God. How wide and long and high and deep is Christ’s love? We simply don’t have words for it! Many people who reported near-death experiences say that they saw a great light and felt a great sense of happiness; some of them said it was so powerful an experience that they did not want to come back. I suppose they experienced a glimpse of God’s fullness of love. But we don’t have to wait until then. The light of God is here, overshadowed perhaps by the things of this world; overshadowed by that same darned old thing: “I”; but accessible to all of us in prayer. Wouldn’t it be foolish for us to stay on the periphery? God is calling us into the depth of life and being. We are privileged to have access. May our spirits respond! **Amen.**