

**“Out of An Abundance of Love”**

Ephesians 3:7-21

*Series: Made for More Week 3. From More Guilt to More Love*

The Rev. Dr. Douglas C. Hoglund

The Woodside Church

March 15, 2020

In the message I gave on February 23<sup>rd</sup> “Read the Riot Act” I pointed out some possible idols we need to stop worshiping. One was Sports. Now suddenly every game of March Madness, Major League Baseball, Major League Soccer, NBA, and NHL is cancelled. Next I confessed that even Church can become an idol and I challenged everyone to “Give up their Growth Groups for Lent” and start Microgroups. Now, not only are Growth Groups suspended for the next two weeks, but worship services, ministries and meetings of nearly every church around us are cancelled. If you are watching this video right now at home you have officially formed a Microgroup. I never realized my words could be so powerful. This feels like a Twilight Zone episode where you get what you wish for. Maybe I should ask for an end to partisan political campaign rallies. Oh wait – that happened too.

As you know - I have no power to cause any of this. It’s all to stop the spread of the Coronavirus. Never in my lifetime have I experienced something which has touched the life of every person on the planet and so rapidly disrupted what we normally do each day. The stock market is on a rocky ride. The stock on grocery store shelves is gone. Airlines, cruise lines, sports and entertainment venues, schools, libraries, stores and houses of worship all closed. Government agencies and hospitals trying to grapple with the overwhelming demand for treatment and care.

And then there’s fear: fear of getting the virus, fear of spreading it, fear there is no vaccine or immunity to it, fear that we will run out of food and supplies, fear of dying from it. It’s important to practice social distancing and self-quarantining. But the result of all these necessary practices can make you feel abandoned, alone and afraid.

Now more than ever, our world needs to hear this message:

I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, ‘You are my servant’; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Isaiah 41:9-10

Yes Covid 19 is spreading to the ends of the earth. But God is greater still. During this crisis, He does not want you to be afraid or dismayed. He will strengthen you and help you. Almighty God will uphold you with His righteous right hand. Paul prays the exact same thing for you in the letter to the Ephesians:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. Ephesians 3:14-15

Jews don't normally kneel in prayer. When they did it was not just simply falling on your knees. It often meant laying yourself face down before God to show your utter dependence on God as Jesus did in the Garden. My first question for you is are you falling down before Covid 19 or are you falling down before your Heavenly Father? Don't let this disease drive fear into you. Every day, for however long your world is quarantined, fall down before the one who is really in charge: the Father who loves you.

What do you do when you fall down before Him? BE with Him. For the next two weeks a lot of us may have more time on our hands than usual. We are so used to DOING that we don't know how to just BE. I must confess, that I am more tempted to jump into doing things: answering emails, going to meetings, visiting people, writing and preaching sermons, leading Bible studies, than I am to simply being with God in prayer, in Scripture, in worship. I've been trained to believe what I do is more important than who I am. It makes sense in our world, but in the kingdom of God, who you are in Christ comes first, and is far more important and more fulfilling than what you do for Christ.

Why? God does not need you or me to do anything for Him. He has all the power in the universe to accomplish His will. His fondest desire is not for us to do great things for Him, but for us to be intimately bonded to Him. Take this as an opportunity to slow down and learn how to BE with God. How do you BE with God.

The first part of the prayer is about **Dwelling** – let Christ dwell in you.

I pray that out of (the Father's) 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 (Ephesians 3:16-17).

Jesus Christ wants to move into your heart. The word Paul uses is not the one that describes a guest or a squatter but the one which describes a resident, someone who moves in and makes their home in you. Jesus longs to dwell in you through the power of the Holy Spirit. When the pressures and temptations of this world push you, stress you, crush you from the outside, what's the best way to fight back? A stronger power within pushing out. Our Heavenly Father has glorious riches of strength and power He wants to pour into you when Jesus comes to dwell in your heart. When you feel abandoned, alone and afraid, remember – Jesus is living in you. You are not alone. You are not abandoned. You don't need to be afraid. He gives you the power to push back the fear.

Second, Paul prays for **Filling** – let the love of Christ fill you.

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, 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 (Ephesians 3:17-19).

The most precious commodity in life is not money but love. A hunger for some form of love – acceptance, affirmation, approval, affection – is what drives us to please others. But Paul prays for you to be absolutely filled with the love of Jesus now. It is a love that is wider than the world, longer than history, higher than the heavens and deeper than hell.

When you put those dimensions together you get the Cross. You don't have to do a thing to earn the love of Christ. God calls you to come and be filled with it. He doesn't just give you a thimble full of love. He wants to fill you up to overflowing.

Third, Paul prayed about **Willing** –let Christ work through you.

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, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen (Ephesians 3:20-21).

This is an amazing verse. Paul literally says, God is able to do “superabundantly” more than all we ask or imagine. I'd be happy if God would just do what I ask, but He will do superabundantly more than we can even imagine. It is not a question of Him wanting to do it, it's a matter of us being *willing* to let Him work His power through us the Church.

I frequently hear this phrase: “Out of an abundance of caution.” Out of an abundance of caution we are closing schools, churches, arenas, libraries. In other words, we are being extra cautious and taking extraordinary measures to prevent the spread of Covid 19. That's all fine. Paul tells us we can also act out of an abundance of love and power. This incredible love and power doesn't stay with us. Jesus is dwelling in us and filling us so we will be willing to love and care for others who feel abandoned, alone and afraid. Now is the time for the Church to show the world the love and power of Jesus. Now is the time for us to care for those who are most threatened by this disease. Here is what I am asking you to do for at least the next two weeks:

1. Spend time each day, several times a time, welcoming Jesus to dwell in. Pray, meditate, read Scripture, use the SWORD method. This a golden opportunity to slow down and let Jesus dwell in every part of you.
2. If you are not sick, haven't been around anyone who is sick and are not especially vulnerable to the disease, I encourage you to meet in a microgroup – either your family or perhaps two or three other people to pray together, read God's Word together, encourage each other. Fill up on God's love. This will replace fear and isolation with faith and inspiration
3. Be willing to reach out to those who are self-quarantined and who are vulnerable and offer to buy them food and supplies, communicate with them, share the abundant love and power of Jesus with them.

Let's live out of an abundance of love of God's love.