

“Measuring the Immeasurable”  
 Sermon for 23 July 2017  
 Texts: Ephesians 1:19-20

People say it often: “It was indescribable!” And then, what do they do? They proceed to describe it! They couldn’t do that if their first premise held true—and we understand, of course, that they are expressing enthusiastic delight, or amazement over something—about which they actually have quite a bit to say. Similes and comparisons come pouring out! *And they describe the indescribable right into our ears.* An enormous amount of water flows over Niagara Falls every hour and the immensity of its volume stimulates both scheming and dreaming—if only we could harness all that power! As astonishing as the Falls are in nature, we have something spiritually comparable in the **mighty power, which He wrought in Christ.** Paul is alluding to “what it took, what power” to raise Christ from the dead, to bring about his ascension to the right hand of the Father and to initiate his session in heaven—which continues to this very hour and will only cease when he has returned bringing heaven with him to the new earth.

It is as if Paul knew that the Ephesians needed something more than knowledge of **the hope and the inheritance.** They need also knowledge of the power that which alone can bring it all about: that is, fulfill the hope and bring the inheritance. It is **exceeding power**—it consists of **the love of Christ which passes** (surpasses) **knowledge.** It enables God **to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think** even! Think Niagara and the constant deluge of its flood, consider the thunder of its cataracts.

“The present glories of the ascended Christ are glories possessed now by a Man.” A grasp of the manhood of Jesus is vital to our encourage here. And these glories are available as measures and evidences of what is available to us, operative in us, potential for us! In the ascended Christ, we see **the real, true human potential**—the possibilities for humanity! Great men and women aside, for none of them are as noble, excellent or perfect as our Lord—here we see the only comparison worth holding: ***our present state v. his glorified state!*** No hero in all of world literature can hold a candle to Christ, to his unsurpassable magnificence as a *man!* Here’s help for those who struggle with picturing an ideal Adam, the one who was before the Fall, the one we have yet to set eyes upon. Consider Jesus, the Son of God who took on our humanity, who became flesh of our flesh and now, in that same flesh rules and reigns with God the Father forever and ever. Amen. In him as he is now we see our future—in real terms of state and standing. **And when he comes, we shall be like Him!**

Triumphant. Perfected. Victorious Christ. How can we measure up to that? We look around us and see *spiritual decrepitude*, failure, loss and defeat. We see scores of battlefields from which we have limped away, wounded, diminished and discouraged. *Based on our costly, sad experience, how should we ever expect a victor’s crown?!* How can “winning” look so much like losing? Such a paradox. When Jesus was crucified and died, it neither looked like, or felt like victory. Not at all, it looked as if Satan had won, that evil had triumphed and death had swallowed Christ up. It was over. Prior to the resurrection, prior to the **working of that mighty power**

which raised Jesus from the dead, things appeared hopeless. BUT, as they say, “appearances can be deceiving.” True. And our experience of things does not always line up with the reality of things. This we also know. For after three days, in the secret seclusion of the tomb, **the mighty power of God** raised Jesus from the dead, and, the stone rolled back, by earthquake, assisting angels and accompanied by thundering, Jesus strode forth: vindicated, exonerated and alive forever more. And that **mighty power**, likewise miraculous in us, raises dead souls to everlasting life!

However, we take it on bit by bit. We start off changed only a little, on the ground floor so to speak. We have an awakening more like from sleep than from death. And, sometimes it does not feel very stupendous—this progress we make through faith by grace. Then we must, *with the eye of faith*, behold the changes wrought in him and name them as our own. And we must do so often. *Shall I be as ideal as him?!* Yes, little soul, just like him. It is possible. It is certain. Really, sure, yes, and yet how so is it certain?

By this: it is certain being cemented in his love for us! **We love God because God first loved us.** But, first, he loves us! That love, incontrovertible, undeniable, transforms possibility into certainty. **God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that whomsoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.** The truth of scripture is the foundation of our certainty. That is why, when cloudy weather comes over us, and doubts and fears assail us, and consciousness of our weakness and incapacity inundate us—so that we fear to drown in the overwhelming flood of it!—we must persevere in faith. May our doubts be but a passing cloud that obscures that star in heaven! We must look sometimes through the clouds of gloom, past the veil of insecurity and hesitancy, to him, our brother, flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone, and behold him, in his exaltation, his regal authority, his place of rule and authority, and exclaim, “Not only is this a picture of what we might become, this is the promise of what his church must become.”

To conclude otherwise is to imagine that we have been misled—that we have been lied to. Scripture tells us that **God cannot lie**—there is no gap between this and the assertion, Jesus did not lie! Not once, not ever. How can he who is **the way, the truth and the life** (John 14:6), ever lie? It would be against both his natures: the divine and the perfected human one! In short, impossible. He says, John 12:25 **Whoever loves his life will lose it, but whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, My servant will be as well. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.** And again, Jesus prayed for his church: John 17:21 **that all of them may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I am in You. May they also be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 I have given them the glory You gave Me, so that they may be one as We are one — 23 I in them and You in Me—that they may be perfectly united, so that the world may know that You sent Me and have loved them just as You have loved Me.**

Beyond possibility and certainty for our future, we have a “present scale” by which to estimate, or project that **mighty power we are exploring.** In lies in our own

regeneration: **And you he has quickened.** What has been done on Christ has also been done on us as Christians. The same Divine Spirit that raised him from the dead, has (Ephesians 2:5) **made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in our trespasses. It is by grace you have been saved! 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages He might display the surpassing riches of His grace, demonstrated by His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.**

So we are not limited to the far-off, or the distant future—despite being real and brilliant to our spiritual eyes, as bright stars are to our natural gaze on a clear night— we have our present Christian life which, though limited, demonstrates our life from death, the death of sin, our present union with Christ as both real and ongoing. Insofar we are rooted and grounded in him, we have, as a suspension bridge, a direct connection between the now and what's to come. In life, and not merely in death! We are transformed in the here and now forever.

Because a Man is **King of kings and Lord of lords . . .** and because he **who is our life is exalted high above all principalities and powers**, and because from his throne, he has **quickened us who were dead** and drawn us to himself so that if **we are his we truly live beside him** even when we stumble through this life, living half-heartedly, consistently aiming too low for those appointed to so high a future, we do now even taste some of that **exceeding great power**; it is evident in our rebirth, and our regeneration!

Furthermore we do not only feel, or think these things are so, we know it. We **know** with the “knowledge of experience”—and not merely intellectually, but with our whole heart and whole being. Because we have thrilled beneath its power, like the surge of water beneath our canoe while shooting white water rapids. We have experienced its carrying, transporting power—been moved in it, and by it. We have sense the push of divine momentum, or his shove in the right direction—it feels like the plan it is!

We map the things ordained by God, trace them in thanksgiving, recite them as blessings. And, of course, this is the very knowledge that we should encourage all to seek. It is like know the force necessary to split a piece of firewood, or how to handle oak in frigid weather. It is not just right thinking about what is just, right, pure and true but a vital, lived in and lived our knowledge of the things of God. I believe it is too little to claim that “I know it in my heart,” because something bigger than that is what we mean by “experiential knowledge.” Polycarp, facing martyrdom, was invited to recant his Christian life *to be spared death as a martyr* is reported to have said, “What, shall I prove to be untrue to the One who has always been true to me?” He had sat at the feet of John, and he was known by Irenaus, Cyprian and other early church fathers—but he had experiential knowledge of Christ all his own.

So, the “immeasurable power” of which we speak today, works on us *actively*, makes an impression; it is known in part, not in its entirety, and that partial possession still rises to the standard of being known as real! One does not need to be hit by lightening to know electrical shock—a battery will do! We do not have to visit every place in Maine to have experienced Maine! Nor does one have **to sin to**

**extremity** to become acquainted with its sting and death. Some schooling is still schooling despite not rising, perhaps, to the highest levels! Just so we say, we have knowledge of God, of his mercies and his ways—and we can say so validly way this side of completion in glory. An inch is not a foot when it comes to progress, but it is still positive movement in the right direction. Just so, we know the unknowable power, we have a piece of what is enormous. A cup full of water from Niagara is what it is, a cult full of water—*it is not nothing!*

So, the **mighty power** that works in us and for us is the basis for a vigorous, happy and optimistic Christian life. It may be a chief refuge from the discouragement and pessimism out there—in the world. **Thou hast crowned Him with glory and honor and has given him dominion over the works of thy hands.** (Psalm 8:5-6) and we contrast it with Hebrews 2:8: **We see not yet all things under Him.** Shall we dismiss the first as an idle dream, never meant to be fulfilled? Well, if we survey human history, we see that *apart from what has been done in Jesus Christ* nothing that suggests the good life, a moral existence, true holiness is anything more than an illusion. Many Utopias lies about us shattered, ruined and abandoned (Shiloh, Shakers, Oneida—the Third Reich and the Soviet Union, Pol Pot or Vietnam). We hear the siren song of progress and take note of its attendant evils (ecological catastrophies, oil spills, Three Mile Island, Chernobyl)—seemingly at every stage and with each advance come disasters, crises, new ethical challenges and extreme dangers. Most “improvements” turn perverted—there is an augmentation of risk and peril at every turn. Everywhere except where **the working of the strength of the might He wrought in Christ** appears!! When all looks dark and dismal, we look up, we see Jesus—looking to him “hope is possible, reasonable . . . and imperative! *It must turn out right because the end belongs to him!*

This same knowledge of him is our refuge from our own futility and weakness noted before. We can feel we are on the brink of disaster as well as our civilization, the climate and the future of whales i in doubt. We look up and like an Alpine climber see sheer marble cliffs between us and our summit “destination.” *Whew! Nothing but wings can get us there.* We may try ascending, we slip back, lose progress and sit down weary, fatigued and overwhelmed. “Let’s just stay here . . . and enjoy the herbage, our present sheltered ease. Then a mighty hand reaches over, a strong Lord belays us. He makes a way where there was no way. He pulls us up, lifts us up and we must rust both him and his line . . . until he sets there . . . on top. Arrived. Ascended. Draw up to be with him by him, through his mighty power. That’s the picture. Yes, I am full of sin . . . I am overweight with it, so out of condition with it, hampered and defeated by it. I simply have no wings! But **by the exceeding greatness of his power we are forgiven**, and we are **gathered to him** because of his great redeeming love and, yes, power!

We can fault ourselves in this. Why didn’t we arrive sooner, trust more, lean into him as invited? Such a poor and paltry effort . . . such dismal results. Truly? Rather than tear us down, these thoughts should widen our thinking, enlarge our hope, magnify our desires —breathe a braver confidence into our timid souls. Inhale. Inhale again. Look, do not expect less from God, expect more—yea, expect even ever greater things from him. Rationing is not a heavenly practice—it’s all about surplus, abundance! Frame your expectations in terms of **who he is**, in terms of his

mission—and not your feeble, unassisted capacity. No one gets through this well without his divine assistance! No one. He encourages **the fainthearted** and gives **power to the weak**. He increases strength to them who have no might. ***And that he shall surely do for us—as he has already done, over and over again.*** With him full redemption is habitual, as Niagara Falls, always powerful always mighty to save.

Our part? Only believe. Oh, and not just believe, but **believe in Him** who invites your trust. Pray for your faith to be increased, widened, depend and magnified. A deep faith produces great godliness. Exchange your thimble for a cup, and your cup for a pail, then a tanker truck—he can fill the last ones as easily as the others! Remember, there are, we have two measures of **immeasurable power**. First its magnitude, its infinite limit (before it nothing is impossible) and the second measure is the practical limit, our thimble, cup or pail of faith. “We can have as much of God as we want. We do have as much as we want.” (Maclaren) Sadly, many want too little.

If the power of God could terminate the entire cosmos in an instant, and we only get a little thrill from bumping into that power—scarcely perceptible to us, let alone apparent to anyone else, whose fault is that? If you come to a fountain that laughs at drought, and only manage to wet your lips—it neither satisfies our thirst nor waters the plants of holiness in our garden souls, whose fault is that? Why play in a mud puddle where oceans are at hand? Cry out to God, plunge me beneath the cleansing flood, inundate me, immerse me entirely, submerge every part of me—he who can toss you in, can also draw you out! Gina, I say go to him, ask for strength according to the riches, according to the immeasurable power, for all you inheritance, according to his generous nature because if you do, I can guarantee that the answer will be as familiar as old:

**Go, according to you faith be it unto you!**

**Amen**