

Saturate :: Ephesians 3:14-21

When our preaching team met and came up with the title for this sermon series, I thought it was completely appropriate because right now in the life of our church we are living in the space between two great leaders. On one side of the space is Dr. Wayne Poplin who faithfully served this body for close to 22 years. Dr. Poplin has been an outstanding example to all of us, of humility, integrity, and godliness. He also has quite a sense of humor (Turtle).

On the other side of the space will be Pastor Alex Kennedy, whom I barely know, yet I already love, simply because I have been around him; It is difficult not to feel loved when I'm around Pastor Alex, because the love of God seems to overflow from his life into mine.

When I look at these two great pastors on either side of the space between, it is absolutely appropriate to be preaching a series with the same title. A funny thing has happened though, as I have prayed through the space between, thought, talked, and listened to my colleagues' sermons in the space between. I have discovered that the space between is not just about this time between two pastors. The reality is that my life is one space between after another.

As I look back, I realize that I have experienced the space between living under my parents' roof, and taking responsibility for myself. The space between knowing I wanted Lisa Risch to be my wife, and making her my bride. The space between losing a job (jobs actually), and discovering a call to ministry. The space between hearing the dreaded "C" word (cancer), and playing golf last month with my dad, who by the grace of God, is a 3 time cancer survivor.

I have experienced the space between hearing that little heartbeat for the first time, and holding a tiny baby in my arms. And then the space between not being able to find a heartbeat where there had been one, and walking out of the hospital feeling empty and disappointed.

I know I am not alone in my experiences in the Space Between.

The space between is a commentary on our very existence. We live in the space between. If we stop and think about it, our lives are one Space Between after another. We find ourselves in the spaces between crisis and hope, tragedy and joy, security and debt, worry and confidence, doubt and belief... and the list goes on. How will we find the strength to face what happens next in the Space Between; no matter in which Space Between, we find ourselves?

As we open God's word this morning, if you don't remember anything else I say today, I hope you will remember when you walk out of this room this morning:

Our understanding of God's love, is revealed in the space between.

God.

In the late part of the summer as all of our camps, mission trip, and activities were winding down, I began to wrestle with the direction of our teaching for student ministry this fall. Through a series of prayer and Bible study, I felt like the Holy Spirit was leading me to this passage in Ephesians 3. So I shared with my staff that for the first 6 weeks of the semester, we would walk our students through Paul's prayer for the Ephesians in a series called Saturate.

I had no communication with Pastor Alex before his official visit the weekend of September 16th, so I felt an overwhelming sense of God's hand what I was doing in the Student Ministry when Pastor Alex concluded his message that day by praying

over Carmel, Paul's prayer for the Ephesians, Eph 3:14-21. When the team agreed that I would preach one of the Space Between messages, I knew I wanted to share this passage of scripture with you because it has come to mean so much to me... In the Space Between.

The author of this letter, Paul the Apostle, wrote it from his own space between. He was in the space between incarceration and freedom; he was in prison in Rome. The churches, the people to whom Paul wrote the letter found themselves in the space between having believed in Jesus as the Christ, and how that belief would come to life in their relationships with each other and with the world.

I didn't make this up, Paul's prayer for the Ephesians divides the letter into two sections. Orthodoxy, which deals with the correct belief of Christ followers, and Orthopraxy, which deals with the correct practice of Christ followers. Paul's prayer is literally in the Space Between.

Read Eph 3:14-21

There are 3 or 4 sections of this prayer that I want to highlight in the time we have together this morning and the first one begins in verse 16. I would love to take the time to do more background and context, but for the sake of time, I feel I have to abbreviate.

So, my paraphrase of verse 14 through the beginning of 16 goes: "Because Jews and Gentiles have been made One through Christ, I bow in reverence to pray to God who created everyone and everything, that through his undeserved kindness in Christ..."

And now we come to our first highlight: he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.

1. Strengthened with Power

Paul's prayer is that believers would receive inner strength from the Holy Spirit. Not from trying really hard. Not from positive thinking, not from 7 steps to living at your full potential...

This strengthening with power comes only from a life lived with Christ, a heart for God, and an awareness of the work of the Holy Spirit that is going on in you and all around you.

When you are tired from work, but there are people waiting for you be "Daddy" when you get home... strengthened with power through His Spirit.

When you are tired, mom, from feeling like a taxi driver, short order cook, housekeeper, gatekeeper, appointment keeper, Zoo keeper... strengthened with power through His Spirit

When you are tired from people drama... strengthened with power through His Spirit
When your family is going through a rough patch, or when (as one of my former pastors would say) you have too much month left at the end of the money... strengthened with power through His Spirit.

When you face crisis, tragedy, and loss there will certainly be pain and suffering. But his love for you promises that you can be... strengthened with power through his spirit.

When your friend or co-worker who doesn't know Jesus begins to ask questions about your faith... strengthened with power through His Spirit

Verse 17 picks up "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." Paul's prayer is that you would be strengthened with power through the Spirit, and that

Jesus wouldn't just have been asked to come live in your heart and you forget that he's there, but that he would be "at home" or "welcome" in your hearts through faith; that even in the Space Between, Jesus would be the dominating factor in your attitude, actions, and the way you treat others.

And now we come to our second highlight: Paul says in verse 17, "and I pray that you, being rooted and established in love..." or

2. Rooted and grounded in love

Love, in the sense that Paul prays you would be rooted, is the Love of God in Jesus. He is talking about the highest and noblest form of love, which sees something infinitely precious in its object. The object of God's love is you. As the object of God's love, Paul prays that you would be rooted in love.

I read this idea of being rooted in love, and I had to know more about what roots are really for. So I did a little study, and I found that roots in plants have four major functions:

- 1) absorption of water and nutrients,
- 2) anchoring of the plant body to the ground, and supporting it,
- 3) storage of food and nutrients,
- 4) vegetative reproduction.

As soon as I saw these four major functions of the roots of plants, my mind was blown. The Apostle Paul knew what he was talking about, and it makes total sense for my life and for yours! He prayed that we would be rooted:

1. That we would absorb - When we are rooted in the love of God, we soak up his love for us as we experience a relationship with Him.
2. That we would be anchored or connected - A tree whose roots are established is not easily ripped out of the ground. A believer whose roots are established is not easily led away from the truth.

Jeremiah 17:8 says of a man who trusts in the Lord

8 He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

When our lives are anchored on the truth of God's love for us, and when our delight and our confidence is in Him, our faith will not be easily shaken!

3. That we would store important stuff - Psalm 119:11 says "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."

When we are rooted, as Paul prayed, we store important stuff like God's word in our hearts. Why? That we might not sin, but have a mind saturated with the things of God.

4. That we would reproduce - Philemon verse 6 says "I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ."

True discipleship or following Jesus, includes living a life that is absorbing the love of God, connected to God, taking his word with you in your heart, and as a result, having opportunities to explain to others how God has exchanged your old life for a new life, and would do the same for them if they would only believe.

This idea of being rooted and established is so that (verse 18) you might understand how massive is, not just God's love, but God's love for you.

Paul says in verse 19, "and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you

may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

And now we come to our third highlight: Filled with all the fullness of God

3. Filled with all the fullness of God

To say that the love of God “surpasses knowledge” is Paul’s way of discrediting a false teaching, Gnosticism, which claimed “fullness” as special knowledge, which could get a person to heaven.

In Colossians 2:9-10 Paul tells us, “9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,10 and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority”

If in Christ, fullness lives in bodily form, that physical body can’t be crammed into your soul or mine. You can however be filled with the Spirit. In fact, Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:18 to “be filled with the Spirit.” It is the Spirit of God, our counselor and the presence of God in our lives from the moment we believe, who does the filling. According to the ancient philosopher Aristotle, “Nature abhors a vacuum.” His conclusion was based on the observation that nature requires every space to be filled with something, even if that something is colorless, odorless air.

The same principle is at work in your spiritual life; your spirit is a vacuum and it will be filled with something. Pride, Arrogance, Hatred, Greed, Jealousy, Lust, etc. Each of these, equals sin. Every attempt on your part to get rid of sinful attitudes and desires is sure to fail because getting rid of one creates a vacuum in your soul. As soon as you get rid of one, something else moves in to take its place.

The only permanent solution to the problem of sin in your life is to replace it with the love of God, manifested in the Holy Spirit, which fills the vacuum.

Just as it is true that every space is filled with something, when a space reaches capacity, what is in it must go somewhere else.

Picture a drinking glass. If I begin to pour water into that glass, the glass begins to fill. If I continue to pour, the water has no choice but to overflow its container.

If what fills your heart is anger or pride or lust, then what overflows from your life will be anger, pride or lust. If, however, you are filled with all the fullness of God, then what will overflow from your life is the love of God in Jesus.

You.

What “Space Between” are you experiencing today? You are in the Space Between something and something else, whether good, bad, happy, or sad. Your understanding of God’s love, is revealed in the space between.

It can be tempting to claim success for yourself, when your space between is a victory. Then pride begins to fill the vacuum of your soul, until all you have to pour into the lives of others is you. No offense, but you are a poor substitute for the love of God. Paul’s prayer is that in every season, you would be filled with the Spirit and rooted in love, so that God would receive glory through your life. In this joyful Space Between, strengthen your roots: Absorb more of God’s love, deepen your connection with Him, Memorize Scripture, Share your story of God’s faithfulness.

Likewise, when your Space Between is the result of crisis or tragedy, you may question or even doubt the love of God. It is good to grieve; it is healthy to grieve.

God’s love for you never ends, and never changes. It is the Holy Spirit that strengthens you with power to understand that love. Jesus said in John 10:14, “14“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me–” Cry out to Him, like a wounded child cries out to her daddy, Cry out to your Heavenly Father who knows you, and loves you.

We've seen it in Job as Justin shared a few weeks ago, and we've seen it in the disciples, as Clay shared last week. Through heartache and pain, suffering and sorrow, Your understanding of God's love, is revealed in the space between. Finally, Paul closes his prayer with a beautiful doxology,
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.

We are often guilty, I believe, of praying safe prayers, the results of which we believe are attainable. I am so guilty! But when we think about God being able... we're like, I can't ask God to do that; it would take a miracle. HELLO!?!? Immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.

Friends as we pray in the space between, 24 for 21, I say let's be audacious in our prayers. I said audacious, not selfish. I'm not saying ask God to make you a stay at home billionaire so you can volunteer a couple hours a week at the church. I'm saying:

When we pray for the Kennedy family, we should pray for God to do Immeasurably more in their lives and in their walk with Him than all we ask or imagine.

When we pray for Kingsland, we should pray for unbelievable growth and health in their transition.

When we pray for Carmel, we should pray that God would move in this community and through this church in such a way that our neighborhoods and our schools would be radically transformed and saturated by the love of God in Jesus.

And however he should choose to answer the prayers of his people, just as Paul prayed, "to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."

Whether in the Space Between two pastors, or in our own personal space between, may we be people who are:

1. Strengthened with Power
 2. Rooted and grounded in love
 3. Filled with all the fullness of God
- and may God be glorified in His church.