

Stand and read together:

Ephesians 3:20-21 “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.”

Using the image of football, the glory of a team is what makes the team great. The glory of a team may be its quarterback, or a running back, or its defensive line, or its high-percentage field goal kicker. If a team wins, its glory, its greatness, is seen in every person who worked throughout the season to be great.

Or take a house. The glory, or greatness, of a house might be the beauty of the lot it's situated on, or its landscaping and flowers, or its interior decorating, or its distinct front door, or its rear deck and furnishings. And for some people, the glory of a house might simply be the wonderful memories and experiences of the people who share the house – these are what make the house great – and glorious – to them.

So what do *you* think of when you think of the glory of *God*? We certainly could begin with his creation. From the distant galaxies to our own sun and beloved earth, to the wonder of color and taste and music and smell, to the marvels of bugs and animals, to the awe of the human body and mind, to the mysteries of the atom . . . there's a whole lot of glory to go around!

When you go to the Old Testament, certainly God's miracles on behalf of Israel showed his glory . . .and so did the manna that miraculously fed them for 40 years. Many might think of the glory of the lavish temple in Jerusalem. In fact, many church buildings today seek to display the glory of God through their architecture.

But it's interesting that the *tabernacle* was God's idea – not the temple. The *tabernacle* was a large portable tent that housed the ark of the covenant. God designed it and ordered it to be built. Not so with the temple. That was David's idea – and eventually Solomon's project. And though God used the temple as a symbol of his presence with the people, that symbol was not important to Jesus 1000 years later.

You may remember Jesus' dialog with a Samaritan woman at a well in John chapter 4. She wanted to know where the most holy place was to worship - in Jerusalem or on her country's Mt. Gerizim where Abraham and Jacob had built altars. Jesus told her that true worshippers worship in spirit and in truth. In other words, buildings don't matter. Places don't matter. It's about the heart.

And his followers lived this out. In fact, they didn't build buildings to meet in until the 4th century. Then the emperor Constantine made Christianity the state religion and from then on following Jesus was more about winning wars and getting government blessing than worshipping in spirit and in truth. You may be interested in knowing that our Brethren in Christ predecessors believed so strongly that the glory of God was the people and not a building that they resisted building church buildings to meet in until the mid-1800s.

When Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem – which happened in 70AD - he didn't do so with anguish. In fact, he used it to give hope that he would rise from the dead and given them eternal kind of life. The building was not God's glory – his followers were.

In his book, “Pagan Christianity”, Frank Viola says, “When Christianity was born in the first century, it was the only religion on the planet that had no sacred objects, no sacred persons, no sacred spaces.” (PG, 14) Everything centered in the person of Jesus. And when he ascended to his Father after his resurrection, he sent his Holy Spirit to live in those who loved him and followed him and put their faith in him.

Do you see what God was doing? He had moved from his real presence to Israel in a movable tent, to his symbolic presence in the temple, to his physical presence in Jesus, and to his spiritual presence in us, his people.

Unfortunately, people since then have often found it a lot easier to build a beautiful cathedral or a glorious church building than to *be* the glorious people of God. But actually, it’s really easier to be the glorious people of God. It’s easier if you’ve died to self with Jesus on the cross. It’s easier if you’ve surrendered to him as lord and king. It’s easier if you’ve asked him to be your savior from your pride and fear and self-centeredness and idols of pleasure. It’s easier if you’ve told Jesus that you want to become more and more like him - in everything you want, think, say and do.

Once the question of who’s in control is settled, and once the question of where true joy is found, then it’s not hard at all to glorify God as his people without buildings. It’s not that beautiful buildings are wrong – it’s just that God doesn’t need them. It’s not that winning sports teams and prosperous national economies and healthy physical bodies aren’t beautiful. They are. It’s just that God doesn’t need them to show his glory. He’s got you and me! And that, my brothers and sisters, is greatness.

Listen again to Ephesians 3:20-21 “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.”

What does this glory in the church look like? According to the verse, it has something to do with what he’s able to do among us – which is more than we can “ask or imagine”. In other words, it will knock your socks off. You never would have thought it could be *that* good! . . . or go that deep! Specifically, his greatness in the church has something to do with “his power that is at work in us”.

So then we ask, what is this power? What do *you* think of when you think of the power of God – a power that would show that his glory is in the church? What images come to your mind? Let’s look back a few verses in Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus and see what *he* had in mind when he wrote these words. You may have noticed that our text this morning was the ending of a prayer. Let’s go to the beginning of the prayer in verse 14.

Ephesians 3:14-19 “For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 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. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s 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.”

“Power through his Spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” This power that results in God’s glory in the church is a power that comes through his Spirit . . . it’s “Christ dwelling in our hearts through faith”. So we see two important things about this power, this glory in us. Its work is *in* us, and its work comes by our *faith*.

The fact that the power is *in* us and not primarily displays outside of us is reinforced by verse 18 where Paul prays that they may have the power, or strength, to grasp the fullness of the love of Christ for them. When you understand that you are loved by God and that Jesus is the full expression of God’s love to us, and when you see “how wide and long and high and deep” this love is, you will have power. That’s power.

You will have power to resist criticism by others . . . you will have power to resist fear and anxiety . . . you will have power to resist depression and addictions and a negative self image. You will have power to love people who are hard to love – even when you feel they don’t love you. And that power is unleashed by our faith – believing and acting upon the truth of God’s love. This is what Paul means in verse 21 when he says “to him be glory in the church.”

We also see that this glory, this power, is about the heart because right after this prayer, chapter 4 begins: Ephesians 4:1-3 “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

When we are humble – by confessing our sins to our small group or to our family members – we glorify God in the church. When we are gentle – by correcting our children and our spouses with kind and soft words, we glorify God in the church. When we are patient – by not demanding that other people make us happy on our timing – we glorify God in the church.

When we bear with one another in love – by not judging them, by not criticizing them, by not talking behind their backs, by understanding that their struggle with sin may not be easy for them and that it may take a long time, by accepting their personality and quirks with grace – then we glorify God in the church. And, when we make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through peacemaking – by dwelling on what we agree on more than what we disagree on, by accepting people who look different, talk different, eat different, feel different, act different and react different than we do – then we glorify God in the church.

Do you know what I’m talking about? This is glory of God stuff. This is real power. And it comes, as verse 17 and 18 said, by our faith in the love of God for us. When you live loved, you release the power of the Spirit in your inner life . . . and that means you know God’s glory and you show God’s glory. It’s what the church was made for. In the words of verse 19, it’s being “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

This glory isn’t about our building, it’s about hearts. This glory isn’t about the pastor’s preaching style, it’s about the word of God and the Spirit in each of you. This glory isn’t about the sound of our worship teams – it’s about how they help us see God on a Sunday morning and respond to him. This glory isn’t about the size of our church budget – it’s about each person giving sacrificially and joyfully to God according to their ability, and it’s about each of us being

ministers of the gospel to the people around us, and it's about supporting missionaries who proclaim the gospel into the world outside of us.

And speaking of outreach, 1 Peter 2:11-12 says, "Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us." How does God get glory in the church? By us abstaining from sinful desires, by us living such good lives in front of them, that they will see us and choose to bow before God themselves.

When the followers of Jesus live lives that are loved, changed and sent – when we live lives loved by God, changed in our hearts, and sent with love to the world – then we glorify God. We fulfill our destiny. We live out our created purpose. And it is good! You realize that this is, indeed, what you've been made for.

After Bill Klugh's memorial service I told Cathy, "I was so proud of our church." I said that not just because people streamed to the microphone to honor Bill – which was a beautiful thing . . . I said that because what they rejoiced in was glory of God stuff. They celebrated Jesus in Bill. Bill lived loved, changed and sent, and you, the church of Jesus Christ, rejoiced in that. And it was a joy to see.

I see the glory of God in you parents who try so hard to love your kids well. It's so complicated at times because each child's personality and experiences are so unique. But you seek out wisdom, you read books, you humble yourselves before your children and God, and you give love your best shot. I see glory in you.

I see glory in the men of this church. Many churches are led by women because the men are too proud, too private, too weak to follow Jesus. But I see the glory of God in the men of this church in their openness about sexual struggles, in their desires to meet with one another during the week to support each other, in their desire to live in Jesus in their marriages and their jobs. I see glory in you.

I see glory in you in the way you responded to my sermon on sexual sin last week, especially the individuals who shared personally after my sermon. I see God's glory in the sharing time as you lift up God and celebrate his power in your hearts, changing you to be more like Jesus. I see glory in those who have helped a needy brother get a job, give him food, and drive him to work and back the last two weeks. I see glory in the way so many of you reach out to spiritually support one another in trials, in parenting, in being the men and women of God you want to be.

I also see glory in you when you face trials and suffering of many kinds. You're quick to compassion, quick to support, and you draw near to God's heart without blame or self-pity.

The truth, of course, is that this glory is being known and shown across the world. The church isn't just CVC – it's all those who love and follow Jesus, who make him their savior and lord and friend. Yes, there are plenty of examples out there that embarrass us and dim his glory. But there is plenty of glory to be seen – in the churches in our area, in our denomination, in the many brands of church across the country and around the world.

So today is a day of celebration of his glory in the church. Come and delight in it. Come and share in the glory of God as you surrender your heart to Jesus and the Spirit of power. Come and live loved, changed and sent!