

The Fruits of Being Godmore
Ephesians 3:14-21
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The English language owes a great debt to William Shakespeare. He invented over 1700 of our common words by changing nouns into verbs, changing verbs into adjectives, connecting words never before used together, adding prefixes and suffixes, and devising words wholly original. Among the everyday words we use that he invented are excitement, bloodstained, and deafening, to mention but a few. Now, I'm no Shakespeare, but I have invented a few words of my own, most of them coming from the depths of a confused mind trying to process too many ideas at once, but a few coming from my reading of Scripture. And so, once upon a time, I introduced a new word into the Christian vocabulary that I hope will stick. That word is godmore, and it's a silly little word I created to contrast the idea of being godless, the condition before Christ came into the world of the Gentiles to whom Ephesians was written. In chapter two of Ephesians, these Gentiles were reminded that they were *atheoi*, "without God in the world," or godless, and but called now to celebrate that they are atheists no more but "citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." Now, they are with God in the world, not without. Godmore, then, is the opposite of godless and basically means that you are on the path toward being filled with the fullness of God rather than being spiritually empty. To be godmore is to have a faith in the living God, to be growing

in that faith, to be part of a group called the Church which is building a spiritual dwelling place for God. A godless person has no divine aspirations; a godmore person is moving toward a divine vision. A godless person is without hope; a godmore person looks to the future with joyful expectation. The claim of Ephesians is that as people who claim to follow Christ, we are called to be godmore, not godless. Tonight, I want to unpack more completely what it means to be godmore, and more, and more, specifically about what I call the fruits of being godmore, and these fruits are eloquently described in the prayer offered in chapter 3, beginning with the 14th verse. Hear now the word of God...

I hope my reading of that prayer gave you a full enough sense of its yearning and passionate tone, of how deeply its author feels for himself the things he asks for others. It uses beautiful language of intellect and emotion, of power and humility, of immediacy and eternity. It's the kind of prayer that you wish people would say for you all the time. It's the kind of passage that only gets better the longer you spend with it. One of the great things about it is that it simultaneously does three things: All at once it expresses Paul's wish for us to experience the fullness of God, it describes our own deepest longing, and it displays God's divine purpose in Jesus Christ. It doesn't take a rocket scientist, or a preacher for that matter, to see that God wants nothing more than for us to know the breadth, length, height and depth of Christ's love. It's a prayer for the ages and yet for us and I hope each of you have been on the receiving end of a prayer like this and that each

of you has experienced what Paul is asking God to give you.

The things for which Paul prays are not of course, quantifiable. They are not measureable, at least not in the sense of being able to assign a number or a distance to the height and depth of God's love. These are all spiritual dimensions, inward intuitions and feelings. How do you know when you are full of God so much so that there isn't room for any more? Or how do you know that you are really, truly empty of God's presence? There are no scientific tests, no diagnoses. This is stuff that is between the believer and God. It's so personal, in fact, that it is hard to talk about sometimes, and also hard to say anything meaningful about. My experience of the breadth of God's love is something only I can truly understand. And yours is yours alone. We may have some of that experience in common, but we probably wouldn't describe it in exactly the same way. We might even have to make up new words for it!

And so perhaps it is a crime to try to talk about what is really so hard to talk about. Maybe that's why Shakespeare created all those new words, because he was trying to express the inexpressible. Even so, though it is tough to "translate" this passage into words which will speak to each of our experiences with the love of Christ, it is possible to say something about what this prayer says in a bigger picture, and what are the fruits of being godmore.

The first fruit of being godmore is having a clear identity as one of God's own. This is what is behind the whole book of Ephesians but also in today's

passage when Paul prays that “Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith as you are being rooted and grounded in love.” Rooted and grounded in God’s love. What is at stake is to whom will you belong. In whom will your identity reside? When your identity is as a child of God, or as a citizen with the saints, or as a member of the household of God, or choose your metaphor, when this is your primary identity, nothing can threaten you, nothing can defeat you, not disease, not loneliness, not another human being, not even death. When you have this identity, when you are “rooted and grounded in love,” you live with a sense of certainty and assurance that will serve you no matter what your circumstances might be. The certainty that nothing, as Paul says in his letter to the Romans, that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ, frees you to do just about anything without fear, without hesitation, without looking over your shoulder. This is what the Gentiles needed to hear, for by becoming followers of Christ, they had to let go of everything that gave meaning to their lives: their social standing in their communities, their ways of living which were contrary to the teachings of Christ, probably even members of their own families who did not choose to follow the same path. Their new identity in Christ was perhaps the only thing which would keep them afloat. This is the identity for which Paul prayed.

To have an identity in Christ, to “know the love of God that surpasses knowledge,” that is, the knowledge that is lodged in our very bones, that is one with our heartbeat, that is as unconscious as breathing, is, I think, the deepest

human longing. People try to find identity in a million different ways but it is something that can never be fulfilled by another human being, or any narcotic, or any amount of money or possessions. You see, we come equipped with a God shaped hole that can only be filled by Jesus Christ. When that hole is filled, our hearts find the rest and satisfaction they seek. And even though this identity is God given and can't be earned, as we strive to be godmore, God not only gives and strengthens our identity, but makes its pursuit worthwhile. After all, that's why we're here.

A second fruit of being godmore is having access to the power and fullness of God. What a curious but wondrous phrase is this: "God is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine." We could never imagine, much less ask for, a love as amazing as God's and yet we have been blessed with even more. We could never imagine, much less ask for, an identity any more firmly fixed than this Godly one, and yet, we have it. We could never imagine, much less ask for, all the blessings, and gifts, and talents we have, but we have received them anyway. I hope your minds are flooded with images of all the blessings, gifts and talents you have: family, friends, meaningful work, watching a sunset, you name it, God has blessed you with it. Look around you and experience the power and fullness of God. The Gospel reading for this Sunday is from John about the loaves and the fishes. You remember how the disciples were all worried about how they would come up with enough bread for the thousands of people who

had gathered to hear Jesus. And then Jesus does his thing with the one smelly fish and the five barley loaves that one little boy had brought with him, and there is not only enough so that everyone there was satisfied, but they also picked up twelve baskets more to take home to those who were hungry. It was far more than the crowds or the disciples could have asked for or imagined. Of course, they needed to show up. They needed to be there. And because they were, they experienced the power and fullness of God we all need in our lives, and we get that by showing up, by being godmore, rather than godless.

The final fruit of being godmore that I want to share with you is being part of something bigger than ourselves, namely the church universal, which is called to discharge God's power into a waiting world. Paul's prayer concludes with a powerful statement about the church, the body of Christ. You see, the church is called to exhibit the glory of God, just as Christ did: "To God be glory in the church and in Jesus Christ to all generations" it says. It's the same "living for the praise of God's glory" I talked about a couple of weeks ago when we looked at the first chapter of Ephesians. People are supposed to see the glory of God in us and what we do together as a body. Who else do you think is going to bring the love of Christ, which we all so desperately need, to those who haven't experienced it, if not the church? Who? Is it the government, the library, the school system, the social service agencies? Each of these have something to offer but they can't offer God; only we can.

So what I want you think about is this: If the church is to be the “place” where godmoreness, not godlessness, is in abundance, we’d better start tapping into the power at work within us that is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine. We need to be the godmore people we were called to be. We need to be diligent about seeking to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ, each of us on our own and all of us together. It doesn’t work any other way. May we find ourselves ever more rooted and grounded in love, strengthened in our inner being with power through God’s spirit, and part of the church that shows God’s glory. Amen.