

Ephesians 3:14-end

John 6:1-21

If you're an astronomy lover and had put the time aside, Friday night was a big disappointment. By a cruel twist of fate the skies clouded over and the eclipse that was to have been so spectacular went unseen by those of us living in the UK.

Clear vision is not something to be always taken for granted.

You may enjoy going to London?

I'm happy to go for a day but more than happy to come home again.

It's a great place but by watching your feet and taking big steps and little steps to avoid people and obstacles and actually not being able to see too far ahead because of the busyness of the place, we can miss a great deal.

However, I've only been once, but have you been to the Sky Garden at the top of the Walkie Talkie building? Weather permitting you have 360 degree uninterrupted views across the City of London.

We can, so easily, get caught up with the things that surround us, both the good and the bad, that sometimes it's difficult to see the bigger picture and what lies ahead.

Here in West Wight is an exciting time. The formation of a mission community. When the decision to proceed in this way was made I'm sure it was made in good faith, believing it to be the best way forward, and in step with the Spirit of God.

Just for a moment let's stop; let me ask you a question and allow you to dream for a minute or two.

Dream of your perfect church - as if there were no constraints; what is it you'd like to see?

Our Epistle reading today is a prayer, Paul's prayer for the church in Ephesus.

What are the things and people we bring to God in prayer?

We pray about those people and things which concern us. We pray for God's blessing on them.

Today we have read one of Paul's prayers.

And it contains something of his vision for a perfect church!

v.14 We begin. 'For this reason'. What reason?

Paul is following up his recent teaching. He's been telling the Ephesians of the reconciling work of Christ accomplished through the cross. We are reconciled to Christ and we are one in Christ.

The prayer's basis, much in earnest here; a Jew wouldn't normally kneel to pray but rock back and forth on his feet as you see men do at the Wailing Wall, the basis of his prayer is his knowledge of God's purpose, to bring all things into unity.

Paul prays that the Father will give 'according to the riches of his grace'. I asked you to dream as if there were no constraints. Are there any? God has riches beyond measure!

His prayer is that his readers may be strengthened with power through the Spirit. But, if it's the case, as it most certainly is, that when we make a decision to follow Jesus and ask him into our lives, it's by his Spirit that Christ comes to dwell in our hearts and it's his strength he gives us as he dwells there, why then does Paul pray that these Christians be strengthened by the power of the Spirit?

John Stott's interpretation is that this indwelling happens by degrees, perhaps as we are willing to let go and let this happen. Let God have his way rather than follow our own agenda.

A couple of days ago I received a prayer letter from a missionary pioneering a church plant in Japan. She says in her letter -

'It's meant adjustment for me too. It started as my vision and I spent months praying alone. At meetings I had to stand up alone to speak. Now each decision goes through the church, there is a process that all are part of. This is exactly what needed to happen to make the project sustainable. It does mean that I have to let go, and let God. It was never 'mine' to hold, but I can see that I was holding it. It is God who has made the way up until now, and God who will continue to make it.'

Our gospel reading demonstrated that Jesus is the one who brings the power and the presence of God. The creation obeys him through whom it was made and we too are made to respond to God, to our creator.

Paul prays that the gift of the Spirit that has already been given will not be neglected but, as he says in his letter to Timothy, fanned into flame. The Greek words used here indicate a settling down, a permanent residence.

And as the apostle prays this he prays that his readers may also be rooted and grounded in love. Deep roots. Firm foundations.

In v.18 and 19 Paul turns to Christ's love which he prays they might know. 'with all the saints' he prays. They're to learn of Christ's love together. It's important that they meet. He wants them to know the breadth, length, height and depth of Christ's love, and knowing this be filled with all the fullness of God, working towards the perfection that will be ours in eternity when we shall become like Christ.

We're near the end of our reading but before we come to it, what was your dream of a perfect church.

Graham Tomlin, in his book 'The Provocative Church' has a few suggestions:

- that it should be relevant, engage with people
- bring hope and healing

- welcoming - a church for all, regardless of background
- everyone's gifts used
- did you dare to dream of REVIVAL, God's Spirit at work

How can any of this become a reality?

Back to our reading. v.20

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine.

God loves the church and is not limited by resources.

Our gospel reading, Jesus' feeding 5,000+ people, walking on the water. These things display to us his sovereignty, Jesus' divinity.

He can work beyond our dreams - by his power at work within us - through Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith. As Jane Williams says, it is not for us to control, but we could co-operate!

Our God is a God of resurrection power. Jesus Christ is the key. Without him there is no church and if we try to live a Christian life as if the supernatural doesn't exist, then we shouldn't be surprised when not a lot happens.

Julian of Norwich put it this way. 'The place which God takes in our soul he will never vacate, for in us is his home of homes, and it is the greatest delight for him to dwell there . . . the soul who contemplates this is made like the one who is contemplated'.

God loves the church and whilst we pray for it we need to love it too. He is able to do more here amongst us than we have ever asked, thought or imagined. But as someone said, God will build his church - but don't be surprised if he gives you a shovel!

What do we pray about? We pray about the things that concern us. Taking Paul as our example, can I suggest that our dreams become our prayers. We have no power other than that which is given us by God.

And as the power belongs to God so the glory must also be for him - 'to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.