

Ephesians 3:1-21

I was at Messy Church on Monday. It was brilliant. There was noise, mess, confusion, chaos but fun and purpose and God. So well done to Vicki Ellis and the team

Not having a role I am able to stand and watch and as I do I reflect that Messy Church came about as a result of the Mission audit we held a few years back. In that audit led by Sarah Roughley who was our Evangelism co-ordinator at that point, we identified that young families was a key target group. Out of that has come coffee & Co and Messy Church. The plan has come together. I used to enjoy watching the 'A Team' TV show in which Hannibal Smith, the leader of the 'A Team', would often say "I love it when a plan comes together!"

Well in Messy Church a plan has come together and it is great.

What we see in the letter to the Ephesians is a much bigger plan coming together. True, it wasn't all sweetness and light, Paul was in prison in Rome and things were a bit tough for the church in Ephesus. Similarly today gospel work is not always easy. We heard that from Michael and Nicki Duncalfe, our mission partners in Papua New Guinea, and we know it for ourselves as we seek to share the gospel here in Chineham and round about. We can easily get discouraged.

Paul as we see in v13 wanted to encourage these early Christians and he would want to encourage us because

1. God has a plan

Look with me and vs 10&11, "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."

God has intent and he has a purpose, a very long term one and he has accomplished it in Jesus. There is a plan and it has been accomplished at least the first stage has. That plan was spelt out in 1:9&10, "And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."

God's will, his plan purposed in Christ was to bring all things under the Lordship of Christ Jesus. That is to create one body of God's people under one head Jesus.

That plan had been accomplished in the death and resurrection of Jesus and was continuing to be worked in through Paul. He had v2 been called by God to go to the gentiles with the gospel, through which as we saw in chapter 2 those who were dead to God had been made alive and those who alienated from the people of God had been united with them under Jesus.

So as we see in v6 through the gospel these gentiles had become Christians and been made heirs of God together with the Jewish Christians, joined into one body and now share in all the promise of God in Jesus.

That's why Paul said in v10 that God's wisdom was being shown through the church because the evidence was there in changed lives and in their unity. The very existence of the church be it in Ephesus, Corinth, Mount Hagen or Chineham speaks of God's plan working because we see in the church people who have been brought from death to life and have been united under Christ into one body. This was and is the plan of God. It has been worked through the gospel and through Paul and others as servants of the gospel.

Today, as we focus on mission and our partnership in mission with the Duncalfes in Papua New Guinea, we thank God for those called to a special role as servants of the gospel, people, in the first instance, like Paul but in our own day like Michael and Nicki.

However we are all reminded through this that we are in different ways all servants of the gospel.

We serve in at least three ways:

a. As we pray for those who have a special role like Michael and Nicki but also like Vicki Ellis, Sarah Roughley and Penny Brown as they head up Messy Church, Ruth Malone and Becky Cassini with CCBies and so on. We need to pray for them as they serve the gospel in different settings.

b. As we live for Jesus, living out the gospel as we were reminded last week in our Re:fill service being salt at light.

c. As we witness in word to what God has done in us and is continuing to do in our lives. Telling friends the story of God in us.

God has a plan it was being worked out in Ephesus, it is being worked out here so don't be discouraged.

2. God gives his power

Vs14-21 were where Paul was heading when he wrote in v1, "For this reason I, Paul,". For this reason that is because the gentiles had come to faith and been incorporated in the church Paul was driven to pray for them. Indeed he had already mentioned his prayer for them in chapter 1 and does again now. The main point of his prayer is God's power in them as it was in 1:19, where he prayed they might know God's "incomparably great power". Now his prayer is again power focussed.

a. Strength in the Holy Spirit, vs16&17a.....

He wanted God the Father to strengthen them through the Holy Spirit so that Christ may have more and more of their lives – very Trinitarian. So how did Paul imagine that this would happen?

His prayer was that the Father would cause the Holy Spirit to strengthen them inwardly so that Christ may dwell in them. I think that has negatives and positives. Negatively they would need to be strengthened to withstand temptation, for Christ cannot dwell in our hearts if there is sin. Similarly they need strength to stand against the world's pressure to conform and to stand as a follower of Christ. Positively they need to be strengthened to choose Christ in each situation that they may better follow him. They need to be strengthened in living for Christ through his word as the Holy Spirit opens it to them. In these and many other ways the Holy Spirit can work in the heart of a believer so as to enable Christ to live in them.

Similarly we need to be strengthened in our inner being by the power of the Holy Spirit if we are to follow Jesus in every way. We need to ask and allow God to work in us to remove the rubbish and to grow the fruit.

Well I have done it again this autumn. I seem to do it every autumn, I clean the garage out and rearranged everything so that it is ready for... the garden furniture! Part of the work of the holy spirit is to clear out the rubbish so that there is room for Christ and so that my life is a more fitting place for Christ to live.

Are you working with God to remove the rubbish?

Some of us in Lifeshapes were thinking on Weds about the semicircle part of which is about this about abiding in Jesus and him abiding in us through the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit pruning us or cleansing us from the bad things that prevent God's life growing in us and us being fruitful.

Take a look don't cling onto those things you know are wrong, those familiar sins, let God prune them that you might be fruitful as he strengthens you in your inner being.

b. Power to grasp God's love vs 17b-19....

He wanted God's power through the Holy Spirit to enable them to know the love of Christ. He wanted them to know the full extent of that love how high, long wide and deep it is so that in the knowledge they may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Do you see what he is saying? They had some experience of the love of God, but Paul's prayer was that God would open their eyes and hearts to see much more and to know the vastness of his love. We have any number of songs to try and help with this; Here is love vast as the ocean, Oh the deep deep love of Jesus, how great the Father's love for us how vast beyond all measure, and so on. All these hymns are aimed at helping us to grasp the amazing scope of God's love.

Some years ago we went to America. I'd never been before and though I'd seen things on TV I had no understanding of the country. The thing that really stood out while we were there was the vastness of the country. One day we drove from Los Angeles to Las Vegas. We drove through the kind of country you see in the cowboy films - mile after mile of open dusty desert country with bits of scrub grass, rocks, cactuses etc. Mile after mile after mile an immense wilderness. Then we went to Yosemite. We drove into the national park and found our cabin. But to get to the main valley floor was another hour's drive at least – a vast place. Then to stand and see the mountains and hills – it was immense. You couldn't take it in.

Paul wanted these Christians to have a bigger view of God's love. He wanted them to see more of how much God loved them. Of course he'd want the same for you and I. I can only use words and then point us to the cross so that we might grasp a little more of how much God loves us. The vastness of the love of God is shown in Jesus. Paul's prayer for these Christians and for us that God in his power would open our eyes and hearts to know more of that love.

What did Paul want them to do as God answered his prayer and helped them to see? Well he wanted them to respond to God's love. Respond with trust, respond with love for God, respond with love for each other as he goes onto in the next chapter and to respond with holy lives that please God. In this way they would more and more enjoy the full life Jesus came to bring and indeed the fullness of God that Paul spoke of here.

Paul's prayer for us would be the same that we might catch more than a glimpse of the love of God but that God would help us to see the vastness of his love.

We know the hymn, when I survey the wondrous cross. The last couple of lines read "Love so amazing, so divine demands my soul my life my all." You and I have sung it so many times. But let me point out to you how odd those words are. Can you see it? Love so amazing, so divine demands – love demands. But it doesn't does it? What Isaac Watts has captured in those words is the vastness of the love of God which leaves us no alternative but to respond to it. The amazing love of God revealed in the cross of Christ does demand, does require, does necessitate a response from us. The tears of a child or grandchild will elicit a response from the hardest of hearts, to grasp the wonderful scope of the love of God must bring out a response from our hearts and lives. A response which opens us more and more to God so that we experience more and more his fullness.

Paul's prayer for these Christians was for power, power through the Holy Spirit to strengthen internally and to open them to God's love.

And his prayer was made to God because God has the power and as Paul concludes he is able to answer the prayer.

Just have a look at what Paul says in v20....

Can you see the build up there?

God is **able**; he is able to **do**; he is able to do what **we ask**; he is able to do what we ask or **imagine**; he is able to do **all** we ask or imagine; he is able to do **more** than all we ask or imagine; he is able to do **immeasurably** more than all we ask or imagine.

This is the God of power and love who through the gospel is working out his plan to bring all things together in the church under the headship of Jesus

This is the God who calls us to work with him as servants of the gospel who will pray, live and witness to that gospel .