

October 22, 2017
Ephesians 3:14-19
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“Beyond”

Good morning! I hope that you have figured out that we are celebrating Creekside ministries today, and that I hope we can all be intentional about expressing appreciation to the folks who give a variety of gifts to all these different ministries. There are a lot of ministries which happen here at Creekside and by Creekside in our community, and it takes many people with a variety of time and talent to make those happen.

Creekside’s mission statement states the purpose of what we do in a simple way: *Because* we are God’s beloved, we Seek God’s love, Celebrate God’s love, and Share God’s love. I hope we do that every day, and certainly every Sunday when we gather for worship; but I want to look at this specifically in the context of Ephesians 3. Verses 17-18 are some of my favorites, in part because they are such a combination of Creekside’s mission and vision statements: May Christ dwell in your hearts as you are being rooted and grounded in love; I pray that you may have the power to comprehend . . . the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ. Ephesians 3:16 talks about being strengthened in our inner being with power from the Spirit, and the section ends with the wonderful assertion that the choir sang, that God’s power is able to accomplish beyond all we could imagine.

This got me thinking about the nature of power, and the longing that many of us have -- I least I have had -- for super power. Marvel comics hadn’t diversified into blockbuster movies when I was a kid, but I was familiar with Superman and Batman and Spiderman and some of the other superheros. I suspect that some of you identified with these characters when you were younger: maybe when you were

a kid you wanted to leap tall buildings in a single bound, and now you'd be happy just to climb three flights of stairs without getting winded. What we have wished for a superpower probably has to do with what is important to us, or where we have felt powerless in our real lives. The super power I have wished for is not strength, but knowledge: I'd like to have native fluency in any language. This, of course, without having to do the hard work of actually *learning* another language and culture. Facility with words and communication is important to me. I've never had the experience of speaking in tongues -- that is, a spiritual language that most people do not understand -- but I continue to be fascinated with the idea of super power that just appears, and I don't have to work at it.

Although this kind of super-human power is really appealing, I don't think it's what generally happens in our ministries; I don't think this is the power of Christ that the author of Ephesians is writing about. But I heard a story this past week which helped me understand this passage in a different way. In case you don't know, or haven't figured out on your own, I'm kind of an idiot. I don't intentionally do risky things, but if someone says, "Wow: that looks dangerous!" my first impulse is often: Let's get a closer look! Or, Come on, what's the worst that can happen? Fortunately, my husband Tim much more attuned to risk management than I am, and has kept me from doing anything really stupid over the years. Even I, after a couple experiences of kayaking in Florida have come to accept that there are powers out there greater than I am. If the wind and the tide are stronger than you are, you are not going to win that battle, no matter how hard you paddle.

So this story from Panama City, FL caught my attention, because we had just been in that area. A family with two daughters and sons 7 and 11 years old had moved to Panama City a few months ago. They even moved their mother with them. The extended family was spending the day on the beach, and mom realized that the boys were nowhere in sight. She went looking for them, and saw that they were out in the water on boogie boards, caught in a rip tide. She called to the rest of her family -- husband, daughters, grandma, and uncle -- and said she was going in after them. Other people on the beach told her not to go -- she'd get caught in the tide, too -- and she said, Those are my children. There's no way I'm going to stand on the beach and

watch them drown. She swam out and was caught in the tide, and pretty soon, there were about 10 people -- most of them from this one family -- out in the water, all of whom were in danger of drowning. There were folks on the beach who watched this disaster unfolding, powerless to rescue this family. Until one man had an idea. He called to the people on the beach and had them link arms to make a human chain from the beach out into the water: there were about 70 people. The chain *almost* reached the boys and their mother, who were now exhausted from fighting the tide. One swimmer broke away from the end of the chain, was able to grab the boys, who helped her kick back to the end of the chain. Then the line of people slowly began to pull back up on to the beach. Everyone was saved -- including Grandma, who had a heart attack in the midst of the rescue, and was kept from going underwater by the other members of the chain.

I was inspired by this story of ordinary people who accomplished something beyond what they could imagine. Not because they got some kind of magical superpower, but because they were transformed by an even more powerful force: a group of strangers were willing to cooperate and risk their own lives in order to save people whom they did not know. That is amazing power: that is the power that is at work within us when we are filled with the fullness of God.

Jesus Christ was not a super hero in the conventional sense of that word: although he performed miracles, they were always for the benefit of other people -- to feed, to heal, to cast out demons. When Jesus was given the opportunity to jump from the Temple mount and have angels catch him so everyone would see that Jesus was God's chosen, Jesus recognized that as a temptation from the Devil. Jesus' superpower is that he was filled with the knowledge and understanding of God's love. Jesus trusted God so completely that he was willing to give up what he wanted and did God's will instead. That may sound like a simple thing. It is not. Every day -- every day -- we make choices about whether we are going to do what we want, or allow ourselves to be used in the way which God wants. There are people who are floundering off-shore, and we have choices to make. We can stand on the beach and wring our hands and say, "Oh, that poor family!" or we can gather the people we know who share our theological, strategic, financial, and grammatical convictions and the

three of us can stand knee-deep in the water and say, “We tried our best, but those other people just won’t do it our way.” Or we can be strengthened by the power of Christ: a strength which is rooted in the confession that we do not have the power to save anyone without God’s help. We confess that once we too were drowning, and without God’s love we would have perished. We have no grounds for boasting about our own power and planning; we have to look beyond ourselves to the power and the glory of God and where God is calling us to be.

Friends, I don’t know if being the church has ever been easy -- the church is many things which we desperately need, but I’m not sure easy is one of them. If that is our goal, we should probably turn our backs on the ocean and walk back up the beach, because seeking God’s will and celebrating God’s work, and sharing God’s love is risky. It will challenge us and extend us and transform us. By God’s power at work within us, I pray that God will take us beyond all we can imagine. To God be the glory. Amen.