

A Credible Faith

The Church and the Communion of Saints

November 6, 2022

Overarching Theme: 2022 – The Year of the Lord’s Favor (Luke 4:19)

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.

Core Point:

As the world awakens from 2 years of pandemic stupor, the words of Jesus proclaiming “*the year of the Lord’s favor*” is a message whose time has come. This passage from Luke 4 harkens back to the ‘year of jubilee’ of Leviticus 25 and Isaiah 61, a year of a fresh start, a clean slate and reset for everyone who can envision new possibilities with God this year and always.

Reflect on this Scripture: Ephesians 3:14-21 NRSV ¹⁴ *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,*^[a] ¹⁵ *from whom every family*^[b] *in heaven and on earth takes its name. ¹⁶ I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit ¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. ¹⁸ I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 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, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and*^[c] *in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

Commentary:

The previous section ended with Paul’s concern that his sufferings might cause his audience to lose heart. Since Ephesians was written after Paul’s martyrdom, its author could not express confidence that God could return the apostle to the mission field, which Paul himself used in earlier letters. Instead, Ephesians returns to two themes already sounded loud and clear in the opening chapter: glory (3:13) and prayer (3:14). This prayer concludes

with a doxology praising God's power to go beyond anything we can imagine. Rhetorically, this prayer makes a dramatic statement of faith. Indirectly it answers the question that must have tugged at the hearts of second-generation Christians. As they saw the apostles arrested and martyred, they must have wondered whether the church could survive. Notice the slight twist that appears in the doxology, *"to him be all glory in the church and in Jesus Christ."*

Step back for a moment into the house church world of the first century. The Temple in Jerusalem, which had been a marvel, lies in ruins. Even Jews have no physical site in which they could experience such dramatic worship of God. So who had the buildings, the sacred processions and sacrifices, the dramatic public events that could take your breath away? Neither Jews nor Christians. Those atheoi or "godless people" did, as evidenced by Temple of Artemis in Ephesus, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. And the Roman imperial administration did. When Christians imagined Christ returning in glory or Christ enthroned in glory, they undoubtedly had such images in mind. They only had to look at their coins to see the imperial version: temples dedicated to Roman glory and deified emperors. We should not take the phrases about strengthening the hearts and inner being of Christians lightly. It must have required extraordinary inner confidence to remain a faithful Christian with no external signs of the truth of our faith. *"That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love"* is an extraordinary prayer. Accomplish that, and you have the whole Christian life.

- Adapted from the New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Vol XI, p. 417

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. Why do you think many people associate the word "church" with a building? How do you think the early Christian movement thrived without "church" buildings?
2. The recipients of this letter could have become discouraged by their circumstances compared with the might of Rome and the influence of pagan religions. What kept them going in the face of potential discouragement?
3. The word for church both here and in the New Testament is "ekklesia" which means "gathered or assembled community." Why is 'church' or gathering with other believers so important for our discipleship?

4. In the New Testament, 'saint' does not refer to a "canonized" person like Mother Theresa, but to everyday believers who live out Christ's reconciling, loving purposes in the world. On All Saints Sunday, we remember those 'saints' who have gone before us into eternity. Share with your group a 'saint' who has made a significant impact upon your life.
5. Re-read Ephesians 3:20-21. What stands out to you about this stirring conclusion to the prayer recorded in verses 14-19?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: Ephesians 3:20-21
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, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and^[c] in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.
3. Reflect on the words of the Apostle's Creed this week:

The Apostle's Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic** church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

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