

Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
November 12 & 13, 2016
Matt Moberg
Thank God for Love | Ephesians 3:14-21

Good morning church! Good morning, how are you doing? Good. My name is Matt Moberg. I'm thrilled to be with you all. I'm the Director of The Table, which gathers here Sunday nights at 5:00PM. You want to take a time out for a moment and write that down in case you want to come by? We'll save you a seat. We would.

I've been asked this morning to read one of Paul's prayers and it's actually, if I'm honest, my favorite of Paul's prayers. Can we honor the word together and just stand up, if you're able, as we read from Ephesians 3:14-21? And it reads like this.

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and how high and how deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, ²¹ to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! [Ephesians 3:14-21]

Can I get an Amen? Amen. You may have a seat. Let's pray quickly.

Christ, You are enough. You can do more than we ask or imagine and right now we ask that you would do that, Lord. We ask that You would be our eyes, our ears, our mouth, and have our hearts look like Yours. In Christ's name we all pray. Amen!

I was having a conversation the other day with a friend—he asked that it be confidential, and so naturally I'm telling you all about it right now—but we were talking about a gap between what we expect and what we experience. A gap between how we thought things would pan out and how they actually do play out. And we talked about how really, in one or more areas of our lives, there tends to be this gap that surfaces. If this isn't making sense, let me give you a couple of illustrations. When the Vikings started out this year 5-0, I had an expectation that they weren't going to hurt me anymore, but my experience has been very different. When I got up this morning it was early, it was dark, and I had an expectation that as a grown man, I'd be able to find two socks that look like each other, but I realized when I got here that they don't look like each other at all. There's a gap between my expectation...and you know, I don't want to talk about your

marriage, but I will, because oftentimes, when people get married there's an expectation of what marriage will be like, but then there's an experience that's a little bit different. My wife would attest to that being true. Her expectation of what our marriage would look like is very different than what the experience has been like because it's so much better. It has transcended all her wildest dreams and the Lord has...she's been blessed, she really has. We call her "Lucky Lauren" at our house, right babe? Yeah.

I mention this gap because I think that a lot of our frustration, a lot of our angst, can come when what we expect isn't actually what we experience when we step into that place. And I'll prove it to you. You know, thirty years ago, if you wanted to go online and download a video or a picture, you'd have to call in sick to work for about five days straight. You'd have to get NASA involved...like, this is a process. You have to dial up...But now, we expect that accessibility, that this is readily available, right now, in our pockets. And so if we have a hiccup in our WIFI, we feel like we belong in Fox's Book of Martyrs, because we just expect that now. Our experience and our expectations have created a gap and we get frustrated because we don't know what to expect next.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but that kind of feels like where we're at as a society right now. A lot of us went into Tuesday with an expectation that didn't spill into our actual experience. I really don't care which side you are on, but the reality is that we are looking at a culture right now that is somewhere in the gap, that is afraid of what lies ahead, that is uncertain of what's coming next, that is unsure of who's going to stand up for them, that's unsure of who's going to step on top of them. We're in a very unique place right now. And so I think about Paul's words now, because I think they ought to mean more to us than they have ever meant before. When Paul says to the church in Ephesus, *you need to be rooted and established in Christ*, we also need to be rooted in Christ so we're not reacting to chaos. We need to be rooted in love so we're not getting run over by lies. And this is a hard time that we are in, a dark time. We don't know what is coming next. I will address that, I will acknowledge that this is a dark and heavy time, but I will also say on the flip side, it's a holy time because the stage has been set. When everybody else feels like it's all falling down right now, the church needs to be the one to say that *we are going to rise back up*. When everybody else feels like nothing makes sense anymore, we're going to say *we know who we are, we know who our source is, we know where our help comes from*, because we are rooted and we are established in Christ, so we aren't reacting to chaos. Now you might say *that's not really possible, it's too heavy, it's too hard right now*, and I would ask you to bear in mind who is writing this letter to Ephesus. Paul is talking about power; he is talking about love, while he is sitting inside of a prison. He's talking about power while he is sitting inside of a prison. You see, oftentimes when we get into this place where there is a gap between our expectations and what we actually experience, we end up being rooted in our setting as opposed to our savior. And Paul says it doesn't have to be like that. You can sit inside of a prison and not become a prisoner. And there is an interesting thing that Paul does when he is setting up this prayer for the church in Ephesians, and we kind of miss it because it's not one of the highlight reels, but at the beginning of his prayer he says this:

For this reason I kneel before the father from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name [Ephesians 3:14]

Now that's an interesting line, because a name in this culture is a lot more than just something you put on your shirt. A name speaks to your identity. When Jesus meets Simon, he decides Simon's name isn't going to work any more—Simon is not a good name. Jesus says *I can't call you Simon because Simon means "shifty", and Simon, I have intentions of you being about a rock. On you I'm going to build my church. I'm going to move you from Simon to Peter; we're going to go somewhere with this.*

All names on the earth derived from one source. Do you know your name? Do you know your identity? How would you identify yourself? Do you know, at the end of the day, come chaos or come what may, what you are rooted in? Whose glorious riches you are actually pulling from to resource you? Paul is writing from a prison and he is speaking about power because I think he sees it in the life of Jesus. There is a way that we can go about this, and we find our genesis of understanding this path when we look at one of the most climactic moments of Jesus' story. It's the moment when Jesus goes to the Jordan River and he gets baptized. Jesus has been living in the shadows. Nobody has really heard of him, nobody really knows what he is about. For thirty years he's been flying under the radar, but then he shows up one afternoon at the Jordan River. He steps into the water, and he says to John, "John, I need you to baptize me." John's not going to do it, but Jesus says, "No really, I need you to baptize me". And John ends up holding Jesus in his arms, dips him into the water, and then when Jesus comes back up, a voice breaks out over him and it says, "This is my son, whom I love, and with him I am well pleased". Now I'm not trying to be a critic or anything, but why are you so jazzed about Jesus right here? He hasn't done anything yet. He hasn't walked on water yet, he hasn't turned any biscuits into a banquet...he hasn't done anything. He's been flying under the radar this whole time, and yet this is your son, this is the one you love; this is the one who has already left you well pleased? See, the scripture is trying to teach us something right here. Your identity has to precede your activity. You have to know your name before you can understand how far you can actually walk. Because if you don't have an identity before you get into activity, you will go into your activities looking for an identity. And so you start in the water, where God screams over your life, "This is my child whom I love, who I'm crazy about, who I can't get enough of." And if you don't hear that, you will go out into the world begging other people, other things—jobs, affirmations—to say the exact same thing to you. We start inside the water, just like Jesus started inside the water, but here's what will trip you up because it trips me up—the very next line. I mean, I know it's a different chapter so it looks like it's a pause for commercial break, but it says, "This is my son who I love, with whom I'm well pleased" and the next line is, "Then Jesus was led by the spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil." Now, that doesn't make sense to me. If Jesus has this climactic moment where he is—I mean, Mary and Joseph want to throw him a party or something here, like the local news would want to pause for celebration before we just rush into the woods, especially considering that you don't go into the woods. The wilderness—that was like, off limits. Nobody went there. But Jesus goes straight from the water and into the woods, where he is tempted.

This is how life works, am I right? This is why even when we talk about what we expect and what we experience, when we read Ephesians 3 talking about feeling powerful and rooted and established, a lot of us are like...*well, that's a nice concept, but that doesn't work in the woods. I don't feel very rooted, feel very established, feel very full.* We go from the water, and we go straight into the woods, from the pew into the pub, from gathering with Christian friends in worship to sitting in an office where people don't get you. From reading *Jesus Calling* in the morning to somehow *The Devil Got Your Number* at night. There's always this movement from the water to the woods. It says in our text that Jesus goes out into the woods, and he is tempted right away. What is he tempted with? Well, it says the devil comes upon him and says, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Did you catch what's happening here? He says, *if you are who you say you are, than do this. If you are who the voice claims you to be, if you are the son that you think you are...* You see, God will name you in the water, and the enemy will try to make you forget that name in the woods. Because the enemy knows that if he can delete your true identity from your mind, he will have space to create a lie, and he will start putting questions in your head about *if you are really rooted, if you are God's favored child, if God does love you then why does this happen?* And what about this—any of you know anything about being messed with by an "if" question while out in the woods?

I was having Chipotle a few months ago with a student, and we were talking about graduation, and when you leave high school. We were talking about ACTs and what you're going to be about in life, and he goes, "Matt, what did you get on your ACT?" And I said, "That's none of your business! I bought you a burrito. You will do the answering of the questions, not the asking of the questions. Watch your mouth." But he's a teenager and he doesn't know when to quit, so he goes, "Tell me what you got on your ACT." And I don't do well under peer pressure, so I cracked and I told him that I didn't take it. I mean, I took it but I didn't take it. And he goes, "Well, that doesn't make any sense." And I said, "Well, here's the deal—I cheated on my ACT." And he says, "How did you cheat on your ACT?" And I said, "Well, there was a girl who was sitting two desks ahead of me and one aisle to the right and she had glasses on so I felt like she knew something, and I just looked at her answers." And he goes, "Do you know how dumb that is, because I got to tell you Matt, did you not know that there are no two ACT tests that are exactly the same?" And I said, "A...I didn't know that. It would have been helpful, it would have been nice to know that at the time." But then I told him something else. I said, "B...the reason I cheated was that I was very scared that I was actually dumb, and I didn't want to take a test to find out that that was true." And he goes, "Well, why?" Again, no respect for my boundaries...And I told him, I said, "You know, when I went to Mounds View my freshman year, I was coming from a middle school that was made up of predominately Irondale kids, so I was kind of this new kid in this new school, and I remember just the challenge of figuring out who am I going to be, what am I going to be about, what's my role going to be?" And I found out real quickly. I found out how dangerous it is to enter into activities without actually knowing your identity first. I was in a math class—I'm not good at math. In fact, to this day numbers aren't my strong point. Lauren runs all the numbers in our house. What's my salary? I have no idea. What's a deductible? Couldn't tell you. What number comes after seven? Your guess is as good

as mine. I just don't know numbers. And so, I was in this math class, and I figured maybe my best strategy to be about something and create a name for myself is to answer a question—I'm going to raise my hand and put my best foot forward. So the teacher asked a question, and I answered the question. But I don't think my answer was right, because nobody said anything. Like even the teacher was kind of stunned by how off that answer was. There was a girl in the back just weeping...kind of like, how could this happen? And it was quiet. But then there was one kid, and he was kind of the popular kid in the class, and he goes, "Matt, you might be the biggest rock that I know. Why aren't you at Irondale with all the other rocks?" And that was 16 years ago, and I can still remember the sound of kids laughing, and how lonely and how humiliating that felt. And the rest of that semester, I sat in the back of the class, and instead of answering my teacher's questions, I had one question that was rattling around in my head...what *if* he's telling the truth? What if he knows something about how dumb I actually am? The longer I sat in that class, the more convinced I became that he was telling the truth. And you become what you believe says Proverbs. And so I accepted—maybe I am the rock. Maybe I'm not intellectually excelling in anything. And then I started skipping classes, I stopped trying, I started trying to be funny by acting dumb. Even my senior year of high school I had to go and visit my counselor to say *have I passed enough classes where I can walk with the other kids?* Just convinced. Now let me brag on your boy real quick and tell you—I'm in grad school, I got a 4.0, I'm a valedictorian of sorts, I'm waiting for NASA to call me now. You know, Lauren asks me *why are you working so hard at school?* And the reality is, I'm still trying to convince myself that I'm not dumb. I'm still trying to convince myself that I'm not a rock, because I often will feel like, no matter what room I'm in, like I'm the dumbest person in the room. And now, I know some of you all, so I know I'm not, but I still can feel that all the time. All because people used to say I was a rock. Or I should actually be clear and say all because one kid said I was a rock, that one time, in that one moment. I let somebody's word become my name because I went into my activities before I got rooted. I was reacting.

Jesus stands toe-to-toe with the devil and the devil says, "Well, if you are who you say you are, turn these stones into bread" and every time that Jesus responds, He responds by saying, "It is written." That's how He starts it. You know, as we talk about a chaotic world and a divided world and how the church is going to rise up in a time of need and be about something, it's not about proving your own worth; it's about letting God speak for you. You are not a Wikipedia page. Not everybody gets to edit who you are. And so if we're going to rise up and be about the church, you need to know all of the things that are written about you. Over 140 times in the New Testament, the Bible tells us who we are in Christ. In Christ, through Christ, by Christ...140 times. You are clearly and divinely defined. But do you know who you are?

Church, I'm praising that in this moment we are in right now, that we live differently than we've looked before. That instead of getting bogged down with the burdens of society, we see it as a stage being set where we can rise up because we are rooted in Christ and we're not reacting to chaos. We are in a profound opportunity to show what it actually looks like to love dangerously because we know our name. We have moved

from the water and now we're in the woods. As much as the woods wants to make us forget the name we got in the water, daily we go into it again and again and we remember who we are.

Let me pray:

Jesus, God you are holy and you are calling us to be holy. God you are set apart and you are calling us to be set apart. You are our strength. You are good. God, give us courage to love people that we have stepped on. God, give us courage to hear the cries of the people that we have ignored. God, give us courage to lay down our privilege and receive Your power. We're not going to lead in our own strength in this next season of life—can't rise up like that. Christ, make Your church strong. Make Your church strong. In Jesus' name we all pray. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.