

An Enchanted Faith

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



"All Saints," Wassily Kandinsky, 1911

Prayer of Illumination

O God,
your Word is more precious than fine gold,
and sweeter than purest honey.
As we turn to your Scripture, send your Holy Spirit
to infuse your Word with truth and grace —
so that the good news of your love would shine
before the eyes of our hearts and delight our senses
so that we cannot help but respond
with wonder, faith and gratitude.
Amen.

Background

Bible commentators over the years have described this first chapter of Ephesians in various ways, as a:

gateway, golden chain, kaleidoscope, snowball, racehorse, an operatic overture and the flight of an eagle.

In other words, Ephesians 1 soars in its description of Christ's supremacy, majesty, and mystery like none other. Engaging our passage re-enchants our faith once again in a disenchanting age.

So let's hear now the word of the Lord from Ephesians:

Scripture: Ephesians 1:11-23 (NRSVue)

¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴ this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Paul's Prayer

¹⁵ I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸ so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰ God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²² And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

***The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.***

SERMON – An Enchanted Faith

It's easy for us human beings to get accustomed to things, to lose touch with the beauty and majesty that's been right in front of our eyes all along. There was a woman who purchased a home near Niagara Falls. She could see the falls from a distance from her backyard. When she first moved in, she was transfixed by the sight and sound of the falls. But she noticed that little by little, she soon didn't even notice that the Niagara Falls were there. Only when her friends visited was she reawakened to what was in her backyard. *"Ohh! This is so incredible—you get to look upon the Niagara Falls every day!"*

Paul is like that friend reminding us of the blessing and the beauty of our God. We get to commune with the risen Christ *every day!!* And like the homeowner, we sometimes get so "used to God" that we forget God. We go on autopilot and tune out the wonder of it all—and our faith becomes flat and two-dimensional. Other times, tough life circumstances weigh us down: surgeries, bank account levels, loss of a loved one, political rancor, or just not "feeling it" because we just don't have the bandwidth. Our stresses feel stronger than our Savior. Maybe we begin to see everything with only scientific eyes—that we are merely a bundle of neurons and chemical reactions. Or as Stephen Hawking memorably put it: "We are just a slightly advanced breed of monkeys on a minor planet orbiting an average star."

We are called to another way, to see with the eyes of our heart. Through the lens of faith, we see things differently. We spot the poetry and spiritual reality that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made" and that "the world is charged with the grandeur of God."

When we tap into this heavenly reservoir, new life is breathed into our lives and our world. Christ helps us see things anew, bringing spiritual realities back into focus. Our vision is magnified to see beyond and go deeper than the surface of our circumstances. We are *saints* of God, destined for greatness, even in the midst of dishes, bills, and the daily grind. We are the Church, not just brick and mortar and committees, but the mystical Body of Christ. We are sealed and marked by the Holy Spirit—and the Spirit's power at work in us is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

C.S. Lewis reminds us in *The Weight of Glory* that "the dullest most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship.... There are no ordinary people."

It is Christ who makes us extra-ordinary.

- ~ In Christ, community is possible in a world of disunity.
- ~ In Christ, reconciliation can be a reality in a world of alienation.
- ~ In Christ, we can experience peace in a hostile world.
- ~ In Christ, we can live to the praise of God's glory.

I like how Eugene Peterson puts it, "Jesus is eternally and tirelessly bringing everything and everyone together." In him we find coherence. Unity. Connection. In Christ, heaven has come to us. We now can live the heaven-kind-of-life here on earth. We can trust that God is actively

shaping our past, our present, and our future. Not only do our lives have purpose, but we see the whole universe as moving toward God's goal in Christ.

When Paul wrote these words he was tapped into the power of gratitude and love—it oozes out of him. But it wasn't an easy time for him. He was on house arrest, handcuffed to a Roman soldier while composing this letter, but his soul was unfettered, overwhelmed by God's blessings lavished upon us.

And so in the midst of reality, our aging bodies, low bank accounts, and loved ones we get worried sick over, we perceive the hope to which we are called. Our eyes begin to pick up on holy moments, those "thin places" where the veil is briefly lifted and we see eternity in the here and now. We hear about the importance of mindfulness, but God is also ever summoning us to soulfulness. Soulfulness helps us cast off our disenchanting to become enchanted again, filled with childlike wonder and faith.

So don't forget who you are in Christ: You are a child of God—chosen and adopted into God's forever family. You're forgiven and set free. You are sealed and stamped by the Holy Spirit—forever marked as God's beloved. The Spirit is our guarantee, our down payment, our pledge, the earnest money assuring us that what we enjoy in part will be given us in full in the life to come. You have a glorious inheritance awaiting you. Christ is making all things new. You are a new creation.

We can trust that God is shaping all things—the good and the bad, to somehow, someday, be incorporated into the purpose of God's goodwill and pleasure. All of these blessings are IN CHRIST—they don't come alone, they come with Him.

Think about it this way, our blessings in Christ are more like PANTS than SOCKS. Who here has ever lost a sock in the laundry before? That is one of the great mysteries of life—*where are all the missing socks?* Where is sock heaven? Now has anyone ever lost a *pair of pants* in the dryer before? I sure haven't.

The blessings we have are *in* Christ and *with* Christ are like PANTS, not socks. We're matched, stitched together, joined at the hip in Christ for eternity. We won't get misplaced or separated from Christ. One of the saints of the church, St. Macarius of Egypt, put it this way: "Within the heart are unfathomable depths... The heart is Christ's palace. There Christ the King comes to take His rest, with the angels and the spirits of the saints, and He dwells there, walking within it and placing his kingdom there."

So my prayer for you Immanuel this All Saints Day, is that the eyes of your heart:

- your innermost self,
- your capacity for thought and emotion,
- your will, your reason and understanding,
- your conscience, and your awareness of dependence upon Christ,

would be reawakened, renewed, and refreshed. That your love for the saints and faithfulness to God would be enriched and move from glory to glory.

And may you “know that you know that you know” in your heart of hearts—that the kingdom of God is within you, and you are in the King of kings and Lord of lords, the name that is above every name... now and forever more.

Amen.

Sermon Art: *All Saints* by Wassily Kandinsky, 1911

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