

## **“A Prayer on Our Behalf”**

Ephesians 3:14-21

Rev. Denise W. Ingram

October 16, 2011

These church members did an excellent job describing what they appreciate about Fairmont Church! Notice the things they mentioned appreciating: the kindness of another member, the Holy Spirit at work in our midst, acceptance, a fun Family Game night, varied opportunities in which to serve others, the Praise Band's music that speaks to their Spirit, a new Youth leader, worship . . .

Asked to express what they appreciate about Fairmont Church, it seems that behind their comments they expressed the desires of their hearts . . . . the desire for:

---Fairmont Church to continue being a welcoming place, a place that offers opportunities to serve others which so often deepens one's own faith.

---Fairmont Church to keep on keeping on so the next generation can experience peace and comfort within this fellowship,

---Fairmont Church to be a place where youth are excited about the possibilities of their youth group

---people to experience God's Spirit at work in our midst.

One goal of the video is to help members get in touch with the things and people they appreciate about Fairmont Church. As stewardship season approaches, the logical next step is that we would be reminded of all the wonderful things that happen at and through Fairmont and, being grateful, would pledge our continued resources of time, energy and money so Fairmont may continue. That would be a positive outcome of this video. An important value of the video seems to be that it reveals the deeper desires of members' hearts. We sometimes guess what others need by looking at their life circumstances – they need employment, renewed health, Christ's healing touch, strength or perseverance. But we may not have a clue that their deepest desire is for the loneliness to end, the courage to leave an unfulfilling career, the ability to forgive, a healthier marriage.

The common theme in these members' comments is that they point, directly or indirectly, to God and the desire for God's presence to continue being experienced within Fairmont Church. In that way, the members' comments and the Apostle Paul's comments in today's scripture passage are one and the same.

Notice the circumstances of Paul's life as he writes the Christians in the church at Ephesus. He has suffered five public whippings and three beatings. He has been stoned once---with rocks, not illegal drugs---, shipwrecked three times and lost count of the number of times he has been imprisoned. He sits on death row knowing he will soon be executed. Paul takes parchment and ink and writes a letter to fellow Christians. Listen to what he writes from prison . . . .

*“When I think of everything that is going on, I get down on my knees before God and I beg God to give you, out of God's glorious abundance, the power to live by the Spirit. God grant that Christ might be in your hearts. May you have the strength to grasp the width and length and height and depth of the love of Christ that surpasses our understanding. Let God's fullness fill you.”*

Paul's death row prayer is for Christians in Ephesus to experience the same sense of God's presence he feels. Knowing death is near does not diminish Paul's sense of God's grace. Paul has no doubt about God's love. He has gone through horrendous situations and what he feels more than anything is God's presence. And he prays his friends will also know God's presence. Perhaps he also spent time praying “God, get me out of here.” But his limited time is spent writing to and praying for other Christians to experience God's presence. We do not always pray for the things Paul prays for. We pray that what we want to happen will happen.

A mother and her five year old son were headed to McDonald's one day and passed a terrible car accident. This family's practice whenever they saw an accident was to pray for those who might be hurt. As they passed the accident the mother said to her son, “We should pray.” From the back seat, the little boy began his earnest prayer. “Please God, don't let those cars block the way into McDonald's.” We often pray that what we want to happen will happen. Sometimes we pray only after the things we have tried have failed.

What do we most need to pray for? What we need, more than health or wealth or trouble free lives is a vision of God. We need to pray for a sense of God's presence, to be filled with the love of Christ, to recognize the Spirit of God is with us. Prayer is opening our lives to God. When we pray for health and wealth, we ask for too little. Martin Luther said, “We pray for silver and God gives us gold.”

Paul prays that his friends will know one specific thing—*the presence of God*. How would our lives be different if we sensed God with us day in, day out, right by our side? Would we spend our time differently? Our money? Choose our friends differently? Wouldn't we talk to God more often if God seemed ever present? If we had a strong sense of God's presence would we be more likely to challenge prejudice when we heard it? Speak the truth even if we knew it would anger someone? Might we do something that made no sense whatsoever other than we thought it was what God was calling us to do?

When we pray, God gives us the courage to risk. We learn to trust in someone far bigger than ourselves. We live with a sense of the holy.

The Apostle Paul reminds us ---pray that you will live your life in the center of God's will. Pray that Christ will dwell in your heart. Pray that God will empower you to do far more than what you would ask or imagine. Pray knowing that at the heart of every genuine prayer what we are praying for is God. As we pray in this way, we help ensure the continuation of Fairmont Church and its ministry. May God's presence strengthen us as we do so. Amen.