

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost—Proper 12—Year B  
II Kings 4:42-44  
Psalm 45:10-19  
Ephesians 3:14-21  
John 6:1-21

Having spent the last week immersed in all things Betsy Willis, I think some of her curious perspective is still working on me. And so, as I read the Collect that we prayed earlier today, something caught my attention that had not before. **O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal...With you as our ruler and guide...**I have always heard that “ruler” in terms of a king lording it over us, but what if it’s a ruler, like a 12-inch ruler, maybe a straight edge to guide the drawing of a line, maybe something by which to measure ourselves. The same with the guide—something to lead us and show us the way.

Well, the first thing we notice is that **this prayer** makes clear that **strength and holiness is not our doing. It begins, ends, and is centered in God.** It’s also clear that **mercy is the mode of operation, not perfection.** We all need **grace upon grace, mercy upon mercy**, as we navigate this life. And we all need **a divine ruler and guide to keep us aligned**, so that **as we pass through things temporal**—a.k.a. the *stuff of this world*—we **don’t lose the things eternal**—a.k.a. the *stuff that really matters that transcends time and space and lives on for eternity.*

And if **God** is going to be our **ruler**, our **straight edge**, our **guide**, **what kind of a guide is God?** By what do we **measure** ourselves and our lives? What are the **values that keep us moving through this horizontal realm of time and space and keep us aligned with the life and realm beyond all this flux?**

One thing that pops out immediately from both our **II Kings** lesson and the gospel passage from **John** is **the truth and reality of deep and abiding abundance.** When confronted with a **challenge bigger than us, a task larger than us, an overwhelming sense of what is being asked of us** in light of a **keen sense of our limits, we go to what is impossible, to what can’t possibly be done.** Elisha and Jesus, they are grounded in what flows so freely, so naturally, when we trust in God’s capacity to provide *what we can’t possibly imagine from our limited vantage point.* We see all the tensions and conflicts and competing forces of this world; God sees the whole and knows, *always*, that it is more than enough, *especially* when we **acknowledge our kinship to one another and our kinship to that great communion of saints that is always cheering us on from beyond, a communion that now numbers Betsy among them.**

And then **Ephesians** really takes us into **deep mystical waters.** This is **one of those passages** that will leave us **scratching our heads** if we **try too hard to comprehend it with our rational brain.** No, this is **one of those passages that you let wash over you, upon which you meditate and ruminare.** Those who practice *lectio divina* know **this way of encountering texts.** Monks and nuns and mystics of old knew that the word “**ruminare**” meant to “**chew the cud**”, as in how “**cows and sheep chew the cud, slowly chewing their partly-digested food over and over again in their mouth before finally swallowing it.**”

The **operative words** here being **slowly and over and over before swallowing it.** That’s what we’re to do with a text like this one.

Hear it again:

**I bow my knees before the Father,  
from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.**

**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,  
and that Christ may dwell in your hearts  
through faith,  
as you are being rooted and grounded in love.**

**I pray that you may have the power to comprehend,  
with all the saints,  
what is the breadth and length and height and depth,  
and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,  
so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**

**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,  
to him be glory in the church  
and in Christ Jesus to all generations,  
forever and ever. Amen.**

*Pause. Chew on that. Slowly. Over and over.*

We generally focus on the resources external to us, but God works with our inner resources which, by the way, God also provides. God strengthens our inner being with power through God's Spirit. *We don't have to supply this energy; God animates us.*

**God reminds us that it's not our heart that has to hold all the pain and hope of the world, but it is Christ dwelling in our hearts who holds that space, and it is Christ who roots us and grounds us in LOVE.**

And then, in soaring language, we are lifted up into the company of all the saints to get the view and vantage point that we need *so that we may have the power to comprehend, literally "to take into our being,"* the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that goes beyond our brains, *so that we may wake up to the fact that we are filled with the fullness of God.*

And in that awareness, *we know, we know* that it is God's power at work within us, and *we also know that in and through and with that power,* God is able to accomplish abundantly, so much more *than we could ever dare to ask or dream to imagine.* And sitting in the utter truth and beauty of such power, all the writer of Ephesians can do is launch into a doxology of praise—giving glory to God in the community of the church, giving glory to God in Christ Jesus, throughout all the generations, forever and ever. Amen.

*We can't know these things with our heads; we can only trust them with our hearts.* But goodness gracious, when we do, there is no end to what God and we can do.

Amidst the **8 kajillion** unsolvable, overwhelming problems facing us and our world today, amidst so much that reveals how under-resourced we are, that pulls back the curtain on our lack, that points out our glaring limits, this passage from Ephesians, and these abundant feeding stories, these are the ruler and guide we need to keep us moving through these tough temporal things never losing sight, nor touch, with the things eternal, never losing touch with all that God is generating in us and through us all the time.

*It's not about knowing how it's all going to work out; it's about trusting that, when it's all said and done, we are rooted and grounded in a love that fills us full to overflowing that is always more than we can ask or imagine, that is always more than enough.*

Whatever we fear will overwhelm us, swamp us, break us, *it won't.* Next time you hit that spot where you just don't see the way forward at all, get this Ephesians passage out and chew on it, slowly, over and over, until you can swallow it, and digest it, and let it fill and fuel every cell of your being, changing you from the inside out, until you, too, can only speak of fullness and power and love and glory, and not *just* with your lips but with your radiance.

When we're aligned with such love and power, when this is the only ruler and guide we're using, *then* we'll be able to spot abundance where others see lack, *then* we'll be able to see how eternity is already illuminating the here and now of this world, *then* we'll be able to trust that no matter what this temporal world is throwing at us, *we'll move through just fine*, knowing and trusting that we are tethered, *always*, to the communion of saints and to God whose got ahold of us every step of the way. Amen.

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