

Healing...a Journey Forward
Ephesians 3:18–19

“So that you may be filled with the fullness of God.”

Wow. What an amazing blessing!

“[I pray] that you may *be able to grasp*, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to *know* the love of Christ that surpasses *knowing*, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

A beautiful and generous blessing for us...for the church...for all bodies...for all creation. An appropriate and necessary prayer for us as we continue to become the Beloved Community, the Body of Christ.

This gracious and merciful prayer is a perfect orientation, a perfect beginning point for any journey towards healing, health, and wholeness.

One of the things I like about this resource and series from MCUSA is that when we get lost, (and we all get lost from time to time!) these four points, or places, will get us back on the journey to release, liberation, restoration, and reconciliation. We begin (1) by remembering who we are and whose we are; then (2) we return to following Jesus; doing so we can't help but (3) become witnesses to God's healing and peace; and over time we (4) experience and witness the transforming power of God's love.

The journey is simple, but walking the path is hard. It can be painful and filled with unknown, threatening places. But in spite of the difficult road, it is also a rewarding and delightful journey, taking us to places and spaces we could never have imagined or planned.

It's helpful for us, as well, to remember that we are joining a journey that has been in process. This journey began when human history began. And it will continue after we are no longer walking on earth. In other words, the journey isn't just about me and my individual life—the journey is about all bodies, all creation. And what we cannot miss is that when I

heal...when you heal...when this FoH community gives itself to the healing and liberating power of God's love, our healing makes a difference in the health of creation's body. We are part of something much larger than ourselves. And we matter more than we begin to imagine.

So to begin the journey forward, we remember our identity and our context. And this prayer from Ephesians does just that for us. We are God's beloved. And God's love is wider and deeper and higher and broader than we can see or understand. And actually, it isn't something that can be understood, it is simply something to be grasped and held onto—we hold it by faith; we trust it in our everyday living.

But God's love isn't just for us human creatures; it is for *all* creation. In the two creation accounts we get a sense of God's delight in creation. In Genesis 1, after each creating Word was spoken and came into being, God responded with "It is *good*." It is beautiful, pleasing, delightful. And God's response is the same when the earthling is created. The Creator doesn't say that the earthling is better or more important. We are *good*, just as the rest of creation is good. And, just as other parts of creation are assigned ongoing creating tasks that ensure the life and health of creation, so humans are assigned a role.

But it seems that we humans, from the first earthlings, have a hard time staying with our assigned role. We can speculate about why that is, but I'm pretty sure that a primary reason is that we want more, that we want to be recognized as better or more important. *And we want more when we doubt or forget that we are God's.* Too often we *forget to remember* that everywhere we go, we are *in* and *part of* God's love. Because God's love is bigger than we can measure or imagine. And when we forget that *we belong in* creation, when we forget that we belong in God's love, we start feeling unrooted and ungrounded, insecure, afraid, and vulnerable. And so we take what isn't ours. We lash out and hurt. To create an illusion of being safe, we

compete to be first, best; we oppress and dominate other humans, other creatures, and creation itself.

We're interesting creatures, we earthlings. When we aren't rooted and grounded in our identity as God's beloved and delightful children, we seem to need to hide our insecurities and pain. When we feel vulnerable, anyone else and everything else is a threat, so we hide our weaknesses, our brokenness. The story of the first humans describes it so well: "They knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves" (Genesis 3:7 *NRSV*).

Rather than standing naked, they took leaves from a tree to cover their wound, their pain, their vulnerability. They had forgotten to hold onto their identity as God's *good* creation. They forgot that God's love is broader and longer and deeper and wider than their sin and brokenness and shame.

Human beings have been repeating this through the millennia...rather than grabbing and holding onto God's love and our *goodness*, we grab fig leaves, or whatever is in easy reach...anything to hide our shame and wounds and sin.

This instinct is isolating. We are created to be *part of each other* and *part of creation*. But when we hide, we're not only keeping ourselves from becoming the wonderful creatures that Creator created us to be, but we're also separating ourselves from each other, from creation, and from God. So we suffer, believing the lie that we're not good enough, that we're alone, and that the world is out to get us.

And then we remember that we're on a journey. And that we belong. We belong to our Creator. We belong to each other. We belong to creation. And all of it—beyond what we can see or understand—all of it is filled and permeated with love. The breath of the Spirit is

love...and so we breathe deeply and remember that we are *good*. That we belong to a beautiful and amazing creation that is *good*. All of it, is good.

And this is why it's so important to keep our eyes on Jesus. Because when we watch Jesus encountering earthlings, we see him looking past fig leaves. Jesus sees our wounds, our fear, our sin. And he loves us. It is the power of God's love that heals us, that releases and liberates us, that restores us and makes us whole. The miracle of the healings that we witness as we follow Jesus, is that conditions we consider permanent, are undone. We live as though "that's just the way things are." "Broken people will suffer." "Actions and sins have consequences and suffering is one of them." But the love of God, given flesh in Jesus, heals and transforms what we think is impossible. The suffering that comes from believing the lie that we don't belong and that we aren't loved, blinds us and binds us. It isn't being given sight that heals us, it is the Creator's love that heals us. It is this same love that releases us from the lies that imprison us.

In Jesus, the Human One, we see what it looks like to live holding onto God's love. Jesus was able to grasp and hold onto his identity. Jesus held onto and trusted that he was God's *good* and delightful and pleasing creation. Because of Jesus' faith that God's love was without limit, he was able to relate to everyone he encountered as God's beloved and *good* creature.

It is because Jesus held onto his identity, because he was rooted and grounded in love, no matter what happened, Jesus was able to stand naked, *part* of humanity, part of creation. He breathed with the Holy Spirit so that God's love was coursing through his body. Even when he was being killed.

Jesus understood, and Jesus understands how humans function. He knows we will forget that we're loved. He knows that from time to time we will lose our grasp and let go of God's

love. And that is why he gives us the ritual of bread and wine. Because he knows that we need a bodied practice to remember the breadth and depth, the height and length of God's love. To remember that leaves aren't for hiding our wounds, but for healing our broken bodies and beings. When we share the Bread and Cup, we're remembering Jesus. And as we remember Jesus, we are practicing standing naked with him.

Because Jesus was rooted and grounded in God's love, he was able to sit with his friends on the night before hell broke loose. Rather than hiding or defending himself, Jesus sat with his disciples, completely exposed, completely vulnerable. These men would betray him, deny him, and abandon him. But Jesus, grasping onto God's love, sat with them. Stayed with them. He understood that *no matter what*, he was part of them and they were part of him. Rooted and grounded in love, he was able to stand naked in front of his accusers and his executioners. Because Jesus understood that even in death, he was held by love. Jesus understands that in the end, God's love cannot be undone or defeated.

May we grasp and hold onto God's immeasurable love.

May we trust that at the communion Table, Jesus is gently, lovingly, un hiding our shame and wounds and sin...and covering us with healing leaves.

May we live, trusting that we *are* being filled with the fullness of God.

ⁱ Resources from MCUSA
http://mennoniteusa.org/wpcontent/uploads/2018/06/Pathways_Study_Guide_Final.pdf