**Sermon 6/23/19**

**Ephesians 3:13-21 & 4:1-6**

Five-year-old Johnny was a very bright and eager child.

One day he told his daddy he would like to have a baby brother.

And he offered to do whatever he could to help.

Dad listened to Johnny carefully and then replied: "I'll tell you what, Johnny,

          if you pray every day for two months for a baby brother,

          I guarantee that God will give you one!"

Johnny responded eagerly to Dad's challenge,

          and went to his bedroom early that night to start praying for a baby brother.

He conscientiously prayed every night for a whole month.

But after a while he became a bit skeptical.

He started talking with his friends.

He discovered that what he thought was going to happen,

          had never occurred in the history of the neighborhood.

You just don't pray for two months and then, whammo, a new baby brother.

So, Johnny quit praying.

After another month, Johnny's mother went to the hospital.

When she came back home, Johnny's parents called him into the bedroom.

He cautiously walked into the room, not expecting to find anything.

But there was a little bundle lying right next to his mother.

Dad pulled back the blanket and there was not one baby brother, but two!

His mother had twins!

Dad asked Johnny "Now aren't you glad you prayed?"

Johnny hesitated, he looked at his two baby brothers,

Then he turned to his Dad and said,

          “Yes, but aren't you glad I quit when I did?”

The faith of the Ephesians was strong and well-grounded.

There were no urgent problems to solve.

In his letter Paul was trying to guide the Ephesians to always look up to God.

He wanted them to raise their sights to grasp the extent

          of God's peace and grace, and his power to change our lives.

He wanted them recognize how great and powerful God is.

He wanted them to ask our big God to do big things.

What can you imagine? How big can you think? God thinks bigger.

He plans better. He accomplishes more.

Already He is at work inside each one of us.

When we want to ask Him for something,

          we ought to ask big because we are dealing with a big God.

How do you want to make our world a better place?

What dreams has God put inside our heart?

Who do you want to take to heaven with you?

Unleash your imagination! Start dreaming!

Ask and keep on asking, and see what God will do for you.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is one of his "prison letters".

Being in prison is no fun, but it does offer one precious commodity:

          time to think and reflect.

When Paul wrote his prison letters, he was no longer journeying from town to town,

          stamping out fires set by his enemies.

He could devote his attention to guiding the Ephesians

          to catch a glimpse of the power and magnitude of God.

Paul does not scold or warn, but rather urges, even begs, the Ephesians

          to live a life worthy of the calling to which they have been called.

He has already taught them that Christ lives in each of us, we are his body.

He wants his readers to think through what it means to represent Christ in the world.

When people look at Christians, do they see the qualities of Christ on display?

Can others catch a glimpse of how strong, how big, how loving God really is?

Winnie the Pooh and Piglet were walking along the road in companionable silence.

Piglet asked Pooh: "When you wake up in the morning, what do you say?"

Pooh answered, "I say: What's for breakfast?"

They continued walking for a while, and then Pooh asked: "What do you say, Piglet?"

Piglet replied: "I say: I wonder what God will do in my life today."

How much do we miss, simply because we are not looking, and noticing?

Paul told the Ephesians he was praying that God would strengthen them

          with the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in their hearts through faith.

He wanted them to grasp how wide, and long, and high, and deep,

          the love of God really is.

Remember how often you bought toys for your children and grandchildren,

          and on the package in fine print were the dreaded words:

          “Batteries not included.”

Do you know what that means?

It means that you get the toy, but the power to make it work is not included.

That is not the kind of gift which God gives.

When God gives us his gifts,

          he also gives us his power, he includes the power of the Holy Spirit,

          so we can put his gifts to work in our lives, and in the lives of others.

When the problems and troubles and difficulties of this life,

          threaten to overwhelm us and our batteries need recharging,

          we can turn to God, recognize his unlimited resources,

          and reconnect with God's unlimited power.

And when all of us work together, that power can be absolutely amazing.

Two men were riding a bicycle built for two when they came to a big steep hill.

It took a great deal of struggle for the men to complete

          what proved to be a very difficult climb.

When they got to the top the man in front turned to the other and said,

          “Boy, that sure was a tough climb.”

The fellow in back replied, "Yes, and if I hadn't kept the brakes on all the way

          we would certainly have rolled down backwards."

When we are not working together, united in God's Spirit,

          we make everything much more difficult.

Then it is time to remember God did not plan for us to do everything in our own power.

He provides us with fellow Christians, and working together,

          we can do everything God gives us to do.

Paul wrote: As a prisoner for the Lord,

          I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Be completely humble and gentle.

Be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

When we overlook our differences,

          and remember the great faith we have in common,

          then we will discover we are part of something miraculous,

          which can only come from God.

We look at a situation and say: "I can't.

     I could never do that.

     This is as good as it's going to get.

     I've reached the limit.

     I can't do anymore.

     I can't go any further."

But we light up and come to life when we grasp

          how wide, and long, and high, and deep, is the love of Christ.

The love of Jesus is wide enough for everybody.

When he stretched out his arms on the cross

          it was to include everyone in his wide embrace.

No one is excluded.

No one has to wait their turn.

No one is loved any more, or any less, regardless of where we came from,

          how much we have, what we look like, or what we have done.

God wants us to help one another, to be united through our faith.

There is one body and one Spirit,

          just as we were called to one hope when we were called;

          one Lord, one faith, one baptism;

          one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all.

God is able to do more abundantly than we think, more than we ask.

Instead of offering up tiny, little, weak prayers,

          we ought to offer up huge, incredible, prayers

Our God is not a small, tentative God, tiptoeing around timidly,

          intimidated by the impossible.

Our God is the God of the possible.

AMEN