

## THE QUIET WORD

### A Posting in Gratitude to God for Hope

There is a short list of words in St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "And Now faith, hope, and love abide, these three, and the greatest of these is love." (1 Cor. 13:13)

I've been thinking about the second word in this list, "hope." It is the quiet word in between two totally active, event-creating words— "faith" and "love." In the New Testament, it is a contemplative word that enables us to think about good consequences because of faith's questions and love's actions. Hope is a confident word, a wondering and grateful word that sees the importance of past, present, and future promises of the Gospel of a God for all people. Hope happens because of the two words that bookend it—the faithfulness of God and the love of Jesus as Savior and Lord. In Paul's letter to his friends at Ephesus, he prays for them, and it is a prayer about hope.

For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family is 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. (Eph. 3:14-19)

Listen to this discovery prayer about our journey with faith, love, and hope. Notice Paul's hopeful understanding of the breadth, length, height, depth of the love of Christ. He will, a few sentences later, describe the one Lord of his prayer as the "one hope of your calling." (Eph 4:4) He will also add this petition to his prayer for the Ephesians: "I therefore, the prisoner in the

Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called with all humility, and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love..." (Eph. 4:1)

In this sentence Paul uses a word that our English text translates as "worthy." This is the Greek word "axios"—which becomes "axiom" in Latin. It is an important word in mathematics, where an axiom is a something dependable, on which to build an equation or proof. When Paul used the word "axios," he is making it clear that God's grace and truth are personal. We can count on them to last. We can depend on the promises of Jesus to steady us. With Paul's word-choice, "axios," in mind, I have translated his prayer as, "I beg you to lead a life steadied because of God's decision, with all humility, and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love..." (Eph. 4:1)

Paul follows his prayer for our steadiness with the four virtues of hope. The first is humility. This stems from the word "lowly," or as Deitrich Bonhoeffer put it "the view from below." The word gentleness (which is sometimes translated, "meekness") is the next word. Jesus uses this same word in the third beatitude of the Sermon on the Mount, when he taught "Blessed are the meek. for they will inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5) That word in classic Greek refers to wild animals such as horses that can be trained. The "meek" are the "teachable" ones. The third word is "patience." This is a combined Greek word "makrothumas," which joins the word for desire, "thuma" with the prefix for distance, "makro." "Makrothumas" for example, connotes a desire for power that is restrained and guided by the long view and the positive perspective—of "patience." The fourth virtue (bearing with one another in love) is that which helps a neighbor or any person who is struggling to stand with strength with the hope that comes from this love.

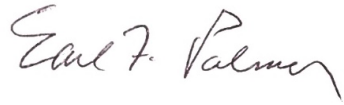
So how do I have hope in the face of the challenges today that face our country and the whole world—as the tragedy of the Covid-19 pandemic and other world events have caused many to lose faith in our institutions. I look to the virtues of hope in St. Paul's prayer. Hope is humble.

Hope is teachable—it calls us to truth. Hope is patient—it takes the long view. And hope steadies us in giving and receiving love. That call to truth and humility must govern my own use of freedom. I need to be (and have been) vaccinated and I wear an uncomfortable mask on my face when it is advised by health protectors. I do this because scientists are trained and have truth on their side. This stems from the doctrine of stewardship that the Bible encourages us to trust. God gave humans dominion over all living things and dominion over our environment, and with that dominion comes an accountability—the duty of stewardship. The disciplines of science stem directly from that stewardship. Science seeks to understand the whole created order and dreadful viral infections have been conquered by that stewardship. That gives me hope. And hope also calls me to patience and love. I am vaccinated and wear a mask, not only because it protects me, but because both have been proven to protect and care for the welfare of the people, I am near. That also gives me hope.

St. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is a prayer for me—that "Christ may dwell" in my heart "through faith," as I am "rooted and grounded in love." "Hope"—that quiet word that stands between "faith" and "love"—steadies our lives. When we meet Jesus in the New Testament and see his life and his faithful teaching, we are won to trust his character. I became a believer in Jesus. The decision I made, then and now, is to trust the character of Jesus and live by his promises and his sacrifice on the cross. That trust—that first word, "faith," in Jesus—makes possible the second word, "hope." And "hope," depends on the third and greatest word, "love." Hope allows me to experience the forgiving love of Jesus Christ in my heart and be grateful for that love that lasts. It is a love beyond our measuring skills. St. Paul in this prayer expresses a joyous vastness. He invites us all 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." (Eph. 3:18-19).

As a follower of Jesus my prayer is that I can be a witness to this faith, and to this love with the hope that it brings. Joy!

Your brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Earl F. Palmer". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name "Earl F. Palmer".