

**HEADLIGHTS FOR OUR HEARTS**  
***(Ephesians 1: 15-23)***

The theologian in me feels obligated to begin this sermon by letting you know that most New Testament scholars believe that of the 13 New Testament letters attributed to the apostle Paul, 6 of them were not actually written by him, but instead written after Paul's death by people who were either interpreters or disciples of Paul. As disturbed as we may be by that, writing in someone else's name was a pretty accepted practice back then. Ephesians is one of those 6 letters that is widely regarded to have NOT been actually written by Paul, but possibly written even close to 20 years after his death.

In addition, the theologian in me also feels obligated to tell you that the earliest dated manuscripts that have been found of the letter to the Ephesians do not address the letter to the "*saints who are in Ephesus,*" but instead to "*the saints who are also faithful.*" So, it is doubtful from the manuscript evidence that the original letter was even written to the Christians who were considered to be Ephesians.

So, to recap . . . we have before us today a portion of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, which the best historical and linguistic evidence shows was neither written BY Paul nor TO the Ephesians.

(Let us all take a cleansing breath)

Be that as it may, the *preacher* in me is now obligated to take over—led by the Spirit of the Living God to be sure—to give our seemingly anonymous and innocuous sermon text a context, by stepping in as the voice of our text today, and speaking to *you* as its hearers. Because it is a fact that one of the reasons Ephesians is included in the New Testament canon is because of its message of Spirit-driven unity, even in the face of the most destructive dividing walls. So allow me to speak a pastoral and prophetic word to you this morning, using the words and imagery of the text from Ephesians.

## II.

Like the writer of Ephesians declares to his hearers, so I declare to you, Lake Edge: *“I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.”*

It was 7 years ago that I began to hear about you—about how different of a congregation you were; about your openness toward all people; about your genuine hospitality; about your egalitarian team ministry structure; about your decisions for social justice; and about how you were just about the only Lutheran congregation in town that would consider having a Black pastor!

And since that time, I have either been interviewing to be your interim pastor, serving as your interim pastor, interviewing to be one of your permanent pastors while serving as your interim pastor, or serving as a permanent pastor with and without co-pastor partners—presently (and thankfully) with. And in all that time Lake Edge, I have never stopped

thanking God for you, and remembering you in my prayers. Because as one of your pastors—despite whatever adjective is placed in front of it—praying for you and for this congregation is one of the most important parts of my calling, and one of the most important things that I do. I pray for you as individuals within this congregation, and I pray for the congregation itself. Not only do I want you to know that I take that part of my calling very seriously, but I also want you to know that I don't play favorites in prayer. I pray for everybody in the congregation—whether I like you or not; or whether you like me or not. In fact, if I know that you or I don't like each other, I pray for us harder!

I pray for you when you can hear me, and when you can't hear me; whether you are sick or well; whether you have problems that I know about, or not; whether you come to church, or whether you don't; whether you are actively involved in our ministry, or not; whether you are a member who has been here for a while, or a newer member; an

elder member or a child member. I pray for all the people God has given to my pastoral charge.

Not only do I pray for *individuals* in the congregation, but I also pray unceasingly for the *ministry and growth of this congregation*. Every time I bow my head I am praying for this congregation. I am constantly pestering God on behalf of the movement of the ministry of this faith community. And my prayers for us are remarkably similar to what the writer of the letter to the Ephesians is praying for regarding the faith communities he or she is writing to: *“I pray that the God of our Savior Jesus Christ, the God of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation, to bring you to a rich knowledge of who God truly is.”*

One of the expressed desires of this congregation’s heart is to have our spirit’s deepened and revealed to by an ever-deepening and revealing knowledge of God. It’s scary territory, but it’s where God’s Spirit is challenging us to go. God has so much more wisdom and capacity to give us—to keep us *growing*, to keep us *searching*, to keep us *“on the*

*edge,*” and to keep us “*on the way.*” Because one of the things this prayer from Ephesians teaches us is that the church that is seeking after God is the church that is seeking to go in the *right direction.*

### III.

The next part of this prayer really sits in the center of my spirit this morning. It is a prayer that, as Lake Edge comes to know God in a deeper and more revealing way, “*that the eyes of your heart would be enlightened.*”

Now, it’s not lost upon me this morning that the perspective of a great deal of scripture is that the *heart*—not the mind—is that part of us that is the center of our personality, our moral life, our spiritual life, our intellectual life, and our emotional life. *Our hearts are said to be the part of us that are our point of contact with God.* The Psalm writers talk about our hearts “*speaking to God*” in Ps. 27, and our hearts “*trusting in God*” in Ps. 28. Deuteronomy talks about the word of God *dwelling* in our hearts, and Paul says in Romans—one of the undisputed letters

of Paul—that the heart is where faith begins to take root. The heart seems to be the part of us, according to scripture, that either *accepts* the word of God or *rejects* it; the part that either seeks to *understand* the things of God, or not; the part of us that either *reaches out* for God with openness, or *closes our hands* in doubt or regret.

And so today my prayer is that our hearts would have floodlights, floodlights whose power source is the Spirit of the Living God! I pray that the very center of our lives would be illuminated by the wisdom and understanding that comes from being and growing in the very presence of God! Because God is light, and that light is always waiting to shine on our darkness, and illuminate the way for us.

When God shines the floodlights of God's Holy Spirit on our hearts, we can see things we couldn't see before; know things we couldn't know before; understand things we couldn't understand before; touch things and do things that we couldn't touch or do before—because now we can see!

We *used to be* the people who walked in darkness;

but with Holy Spirit-powered floodlights shining on our hearts, we are *now* the people who have seen a great light!

But my prayer isn't only that our hearts would have *floodlights*. My prayer for us is also that our hearts may have headlights!

Because our hearts indeed need to be *flooded* and *penetrated* with the light of God, so that that which is the very center of our being will not be or stay in the darkness of ignorance, but will instead be dragged—sometimes kicking and screaming, but dragged nevertheless sometimes—into the light of knowledge.

But I also pray for *headlights for our hearts*—headlights whose power source is also the Spirit of the Living God. Because with headlights, you can see where you are going; you can better see the road that you are being called to carry your enlightened heart on. And that's important, because just because YOUR heart is flooded with light, doesn't mean

EVERYBODY’S heart is flooded with light! Some of those whose hearts have not yet seen the light are always busy throwing up roadblocks, digging out potholes, putting up fake detour signs, or starting road construction in the middle of your journey. But with *headlights on our hearts*, not only can we more clearly see those things that are *right in front of us*, but we can also begin to see *further down the road*, to be able to see what God has for us, and to be able to carefully navigate our way through all the things that seek to turn us around, so that we can keep “easin’ on down the road”—in the right direction. God’s direction! The direction of love.

#### IV.

And what is it that we need so much light to see? So much illumination to find? What is the light of God pointing us to that is beyond us now?

Lake Edge, we need all that light, we need to be that lit up, so that “we may know what is the hope to which God has called us, what are the riches of God’s glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the

*immeasurable greatness of God's power for us who believe, according to the working of God's great power.*"

I'm going to quickly break that down in a prayerful and prophetic way for us this morning.

- I have no doubt that part of the hope to which God is presently calling us is to intentionally become a multi-racial/ethnic/cultural faith community;
- And I have no doubt that the riches of God's glorious inheritance among the saints—who are us—translates into both the present gifts of the Spirit we have among us, and the faith we have among us, that God will provide the rest of who and what we need to break open the awesome and intimidating ministry of intentionally becoming a multi-racial/ethnic/cultural faith community;

- And I have no doubt that what is the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe, according to the working of God's power, is that God—who has ALL power—is indeed ABLE to provide exceedingly and abundantly upon us in that endeavor, *if that is indeed what we decide as a congregation that we want to do.*

That is a discussion that we will begin to have at our Dec. 17 congregational meeting. Hopefully it will lead us to Spirit-driven unity in the face of the most destructive of dividing walls.

But today we have been reminded that the one who we call the Christ, the one who the greatness of God's power raised from the dead, and seated at God's right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come, has had all things put under his feet and has been made the head over all things

for the church, which is Christ's body, the fullness of the One who fills all of creation.

We, the church, Christ's body, are the fullness of the One who fills all of creation!

This is my prayer. I pray that it is your prayer too. Amen.

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