

**Ezekiel 34: 11-16, 20-24**  
**Ephesians 1: 15-23**  
**November 20, 2011**  
**Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church**

Back in the 1990's there was a country song which pictures a woman looking wistfully out a window. Nothing is wrong. She loves her husband and her children. There is truly nothing in her life that she wants to change. Yet and still in the song she wonders, "Is there life out there?" I begin this way because I believe at one time or another we all have felt this way about being Christians. We believe that Jesus is the Messiah. We believe the Bible is a trustworthy account of God's ways with creation and humanity. We show up in church, serve in the ministry, pray and try to do the right thing by God and our fellow humans. There is nothing we would change about any of this. We expect to go to heaven when we die. And yet as the bells ring and the choir sings; as we sing the hymns and the preacher preaches; make our offerings, share our joys and concerns and are sent back out into the world do we not sometimes gaze at the stained glass windows and wonder, isn't there more than this?

The words of scripture and hymns are so wonderful! The great music and harmonious voices speak of such wonder and joy! Why is life well, so...so *ordinary*? Biblical life is so colorful, so *hi-def*! Why is the spiritual life sometimes so flat in tone? Why do we feel such a gap between the vision and the reality? Is there something wrong with us? Is there something inadequate about our faith? Maybe if we waved our hands more ore sang louder! Is there life out there?

No, I am not depressed. But I do share this experience. And the answer to the first question—“Is there life out there?” -- is, “YES! YES! YES! YES! YES! A thousand times YES!” There *is* more life out there! No matter how much life there is there is always *more!* God is infinite and in God life is infinite. The reason life is eternal is that there is so much of it that we need eternity to experience it all. The life that we have on earth does not stop when we die. Yes, the biological, psychological, emotional *life ceases. But the spiritual life—the life that God invests in every life—continues on.*

The answer to the next question—“Is there something wrong or inadequate about our faith”—is “NO! NO! NO! NO! NO! a thousand times NO! There is nothing wrong with your faith! Why? Because, as the Bible continually teaches us, faith is a gift from God. God ‘s gifts are always priceless. If God has given you faith then you have all you need. Jesus teaches that all we need is faith the size of a tiny mustard seed. There is nothing wrong with your faith.

Paul makes this point to the Ephesians in the passage we just heard:

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.

Paul affirms that the faith of the Ephesians is enough. They cannot believe or do another thing to make themselves more precious in God’s sight. And Paul *gives thanks!* He is overcome with a feeling of thanksgiving. The Greek word translated here is *eucharisto*. It is the same word we use to describe the Lord’s Supper, *Eucharist*. The word is made up of two words: *eu* which means *good*, and *charis*, which means *grace*. This is fact a redundancy. Grace is always good! So, *good* grace, which we translate as *thanksgiving* indicates something extraordinary. Paul is delighted with the Ephesians’ faith! I am no Paul, but I can tell you that I too am delighted with your faith! In the past two weeks you have demonstrated what it means to be a vital community

of faith independent of your pastor. I hope you feel very good about how you have been faithful to the ministry of Jesus Christ allowing me to grieve the loss of my mother and MJ and me to comfort our children and to do the hard work of breaking up my mother's apartment and settling her affairs..

Now comes the hard part. None of this touches the fact that there is a gap between the great promises of faith and our daily experience. We are still left with that vague sense of absence—that wondering, “Shouldn't there be more?” Is there life out there?

In the next couple of verses of his letter, Paul says some remarkable even stunning things:

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the *eyes of your heart enlightened*, you may *know* what is the *hope* to which he has called you, what are the riches of his inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

This is it. This is the *more*—and what a “more” it is!” Yet notice that having affirmed the total adequacy of their faith, Paul now prays that they will receive this “more.” Out of Paul's delight, his *eu-charisto* that he wants the Ephesians to receive an additional gift which above and beyond the gift God has already given. What is this gift? Paul says that they may “*know the hope to which he has called you.*”

Ok, so what is this *hope*? As I have said many times, hope in the Bible does not mean wishful thinking. It does not mean, “I hope I can watch television this year without being brutalized by angry distorted political attack messages.” Wishful thinking indeed! *Biblical* hope means the expectation that God will be faithful to God's promises. To live in hope is to trust that although all the outward appearances, God is faithful and God's goodness will prevail—not just some glorious hereafter, but right here in the land of the living. Living in hope means that we live as if the promised reality is the true reality. We do not wait for the day when God will wipr

away every tear, we become people who wipe away tears. We do not wonder when peace will come we become people of peace. We do not wish that God will save our children from the world's evil, we become a community that grounds our children in the life giving practices of our faith in God's love revealed in Jesus Christ. With the Psalmist we become people who believe that we will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

But here is the catch: as with faith, this too is a gift. We cannot manufacture this hope. Paul prays that God will *give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation*. With this spirit comes, in Paul's beautiful and poetic words, the enlightenment of the *eyes of our hearts*. In other words we begin to *see* the spiritual reality of what God has promised. We begin to shift our belief that this material world is all there is and begin to live in what Barbara Brown Taylor calls the *really real world*. It is what Jesus called the Kingdom of God. When this happens, Paul says, the power comes. We begin to experience the *more*. We begin to experience the life that we suspect exists but seems "out there" beyond the possibility of our experience. Paul calls this, "the immeasurable greatness of (God's) power for those of us who believe according to the workings of his great power.

Friends this is a gift God wants us to have. But we have to do two things. First we need to believe that this "more" is really real and available to us. It is like being told that an uncle left us a million dollars. We need to believe that this bequest is really *for us*, not some cruel hoax. And then we need to be willing to claim the relationship and want to receive the gift.

Can you believe that God means for you to open the eyes of your heart and to live in a completely new reality? Can you take the risk of stepping out of the assumptions of your life, the fears and doubts to receive wings to fly? Amen.