

Beyond Our Comprehension  
Sermon for the 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Easter (Exaudi)  
Sermon Text: Ephesians 3:14-21



*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup>from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, <sup>16</sup>that according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup>so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup>may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup>and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. <sup>20</sup>Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, <sup>21</sup>to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

A relative happily invited us as a family for coffee and cake on a regular basis. However, what she called coffee and cake was a very modest and not really true statement because the cakes laid out on the table were not just for a small family of four, but rather enough for a battalion of starving soldiers. There were at least 5 different types of cake on the table and naturally, we were all supposed to try a slice of each cake. Since then, I have come to understand what is meant by there being more than you need or can eat. The verses I just read from Ephesians are also about an abundance that is beyond measure, so that it cannot be grasped, beyond our knowledge, beyond our language, beyond our comprehension— so high, so deep, so wide, so long that you can't even see the beginning or the end. And this table with such abundance is set for us! It is an infinite abundance. It is no coincidence that we read this text between Ascension Day and Pentecost. Christ ascended into heaven on Ascension Day and the Church waits for the Holy Spirit between Ascension Day and Pentecost. At Jesus' Ascension, the Church has not yet experienced this abundance. At Jesus' Ascension, the Church looks up to heaven with empty hands and looks over into the Kingdom to come, where the abundance is, abundance that is with Jesus and not with us. On the one hand, we see the empty hands and on the other side, we see the fullness that awaits us when Pentecost arrives.

First let's look at the Church with empty hands. Lacking something is something we know very well. We know this shortage from our personal lives, we see it in the political world, and also in the Church. In the personal world, I have to make sure that I can get by on my salary, otherwise there won't be enough for my pension. It may be that I suppress the interests of others so that I can succeed. There just isn't enough room for everyone in the upper echelons, nor are there enough resources in our entire world for everyone to live in splendor. People have to fight to get as much as possible of what there is! Where there is too little, people quarrel. Everyone wants to see that he gets his due. There are violent wars where the strongest get the biggest piece of the pie. But we also see this shortage in the Church. Where fewer people come to church, we as Christians try our hardest to win back our own children and those who are estranged from the Church. This is why we sometimes do without central concepts of Christianity so that the threshold to the world is lowered. However, this makes the Gospel cheap and unattractive. Sometimes we complain bitterly about the decline of the Church, and yet we should not be surprised that this is the case because the Church sometimes does not seem to have the abundance that Paul speaks of in Ephesians. Today, however, we don't just want to talk about the shortages that exist throughout the world, but we also want to talk about this abundance.

What does this fullness mean which the letter to the Ephesians talks about? What does it mean to be filled with Christ? What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? If we follow the footsteps of our Lord Jesus, we get an impression of what this can mean because through Jesus, we can always get an idea of what this means. He already lets us know this at the beginning of His ministry at the wedding in Cana. There He turned water into wine and showed everyone that He could fill the empty jars to the brim with the best wine. The same applies to Peter's huge catch of fish. Peter couldn't even count how many fish he caught and his nets were so full that they threatened to break. We see this again at the feeding of the five thousand – all the leftovers filled the baskets to the brim! In all these miracles, however, it becomes clear that Jesus not only wants to satisfy people with wine, fish, and bread, but that He ultimately wants to give us something much more precious. That's why He says to the Samaritan woman: "but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again." (John 4:14) What does it mean when Jesus fills us in this way? And what does it mean for us, who

experience nothing but lack in our personal lives, in our world, and in our church? If we look at Jesus, we realize that He is not frugal with His abundance. He, who is God, made Himself empty regardless of the consequences. He was born into our world so that we could become rich. The fact that Jesus was born into our world, where there is so much lack, is part of His plan. It means that we can experience this Jesus and His fullness not somewhere in heaven, but here in our world too. He lives in us and we can be rooted in Him. At this point, I am reminded again of my relative's cake table. Back then, everyone realized that there was simply too much and it was impossible to eat so much cake. Only with Christ and His abundance, is the difference between what we can receive and what He is so much greater. Christ, and who He is, far surpasses our thinking. The prayer in Ephesians expresses this with these words: *"far more abundantly than all that we ask or think..."* We must not forget that this is a prayer. We pray out of the experience of emptiness and lack. Then we marvel at the fact that Jesus can give us so much more than we can ask or understand. This fullness of which our Lord Jesus speaks doesn't happen somewhere far away from us, it happens within us and in our world. Jesus finds a place in my little life, especially when I partake of His body and blood in the Lord's Supper. The fact that Jesus comes all the way to us means that I can be rooted in Him and can grow from Him and remain in His love. Being rooted in Jesus means an intimate connection. Just as the tree stands firm through its roots and can send healthy nourishment to the tiniest branches of the tree, so Jesus does for those rooted in Him. Power flows to us from Him and it affects us throughout our lives so that we can remain firmly rooted in Jesus, even in the storms of life. Even then, and especially then, when I feel so much lack in my life.

When Jesus comes so close to us that we can be rooted and strengthened in Him, you could almost think of it as He is a part of us, that He lives somewhere deep inside my heart. It is true that Jesus dwells within us, but we notice that this prayer in Ephesians has a different focus – not deep within, but out in the world! We pray that in our personal lives and as a Church, we will not recognize the narrowness of our hearts but the breadth of Christ! We are talking about a Christ who not only dwells in our hearts but is also at the right hand of the Father. By casting our gaze on Christ in the distance, we realize that He has not only become ours, but that we have become one of His. In our prayers, we look to this Christ at the right hand of the Father. We do this precisely out of our poverty and we do this because we know that the fullness of everything is hidden Christ. If we are Christians and have been baptized, it does not only mean that we have reached our goal, it also means that through our rootedness in Christ, we have first seen what is waiting for us. And only then do we realize that the fullness of God is so much higher and deeper and wider and longer than we can imagine. The God of abundance has prepared this for us! Therefore, do not be satisfied with a little Christianity, with a little strength, with a little of His love, with a little of His comfort in difficult times. Don't be satisfied with the church calendar as a family ritual to embellish family celebrations. God wants to give us more and wants to *"do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think!"* This sentence by the apostle is aimed right at the heart of a glorious eternity. We are to be God's children not only here and now, but for eternity. In the end, there will be life from an abundant fullness. But this life begins already now. That is what brings us to our knees so that we pray. When it comes to God and His love, it quickly becomes clear that we are always beginners. It is comforting that this prayer concludes with the fact that God gives more than we can ask or imagine. This means that we can't judge our prayers according to success or failure. Such calculating is misplaced because God gives us more than we can ask or comprehend. Our requests for material blessings, protection, or healing are good and right. But it is not the material blessing that makes us happy, it's the infinite Giver behind it. Paul, in coming to the love of God, goes to his knees and Paul invites us to do the same. Even, and especially, when we can't comprehend God and His love. Understood or not understood, we should and can only praise and worship this gracious God. Amen.