

Sermon Notes on Ephesians 3:20–21, Jude 20 - 25
‘In Jesus, there ain’t no mountain high enough’

As always, when packing for our walking holidays, Gilli is usually right and she did ask why did I pack such a big, heavy book (she was looking at the book ‘Dirty Glory’ by Pete Grieg) as I prepared to walk the Lady Anne’s Way. As always, a good question and I always take a serious book with me but in my defence, what there is of it, is that it seemed a lighter when I picked it up but when out walking it certainly felt a lot heavier!! This is the second book telling the story of the 24-7 prayer movement and though heavy physically, it was properly heavy in a spiritual sense. Like the first book, ‘Red Moon Rising’ this book blows your heart, your mind and your soul and thus it was so appropriate for walking the Lady Anne’s Way when we were standing on the tops such as the incredibly bleak and beautiful Steak Moss, the breathtaking loneliness of the ‘High Way’ (which is meant to be spelt this way) which is concluded by the astonishing ‘Water Cut’ sculpture and then you have the contrasting and different loveliness of the river Eden valley whose width just goes on and on and on. The doxology here in verses 20 and 21 act as a counter point to Ephesians 4 verse 1 and together they act as a fulcrum to the whole letter. In other words, we are invited to soak ourselves in the enormity of God’s love and then with our whole lives answer the question ‘How are you going to show how much you love him back?’

I would like to thank all who came to the Vision Day at the start of the month and using a probably suspect motoring analogy the Vision Day reminded us that Jesus is the engine, this Doxology is the fuel, the Holy Spirit is the satnav and we matter because we are the drivers for without drivers cars won’t be going anywhere which is not what a car is for!! On that Sunday there was lots of good discussion and I sat in to hear as much of the feedback from the six groups as I could and it was truly fabulous. When Graham summarised the day, he gave us six main areas to focus on and it does look like a BIG Venn diagram which for me is something which gives me immense joy. The six areas are as follows:

1 Leadership – It was good to hear the church’s appreciation of the current leadership team and there is the recognition that the team does need to grow. But there is also a need for the growth of more leaders within the wider life and mission of the church too.

2 Discipleship – We as a church need to continue to grow and to flourish in our love of God and of our neighbour.

3 Evangelism – We as a church recognise our need to receive training and learn to be Confident and competent in how we share the Good News of Jesus. In the autumn, as part of our usual learning times together, we will be engaging with Arise Sheffield, with the sessions led by Giles Holloway, to enable us to be both as we share Jesus.

4 Prayer – We all know that prayer is central to our life as a church and in our lives as Christians but at the same time we recognise that we don’t live as if this is so. Therefore, how can we be encouraged and enabled to pray more in line with our aspiration?

5 Community Engagement – Here it was recognised just how much the church has grown in this and that we are to recognise that enriching our community is in one sense enough. Yet, our community engagement is always to be more than just enriching, we are to also yearn and pray and enable all the people we meet to come

to know Jesus for themselves too.

6 Families – It was recognised that we still need to see this part of the demographic of the church continues to grow and flourish. However, let me give the reasons why I think it matters. This church is always to be a microcosm of the new creation which God is going to bring in, which means that we are to be multigenerational and this means that all generations are to shape and mould ourselves as a church into the new future which God has for us. This means that we need to engage in the hard task of double listening which means that as a church we are not only to pray for younger generations to listen to us, but we are to listen to them too in helping us to live out the life of Jesus today and into tomorrow. This means that this ministry is not about sustaining today tomorrow but about helping us live today in a way which welcomes tomorrow.

So, why is doxology to be compared to being like fuel? My hunch is, is that doxology properly absorbed will inspire us in all we are, energise us to live this way, enable us to breathe deeper than we've ever breathed before into a life of wonder, love and praise. Doxology is another way of speaking of the necessity of worship that we may be reminded of who is at work in each and every one of us as we have read in the previous three chapters. We are to worship this God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We're to be changed by this astonishing fourfold love described in verse 18; to know the breathless blessing we thought long and hard over in chapter 1 verses 3 – 14; to experience the fulness of God spoken of in verse 19; to be wowed by the 'But God...' and 'But Now...' in chapter 2; to delight in the incalculable riches of Christ in verse 8 and be part of the awesome Temple language which runs through the whole book of which we at times are hardly aware. Pete Grieg in his book 'Dirty Glory' calls to us to pray as if our very lives, the life of this church, of this town, this country, this world depends on it; and by the way it does. What are we to pray? We're to pray daring for this Father, Son and Holy Spirit God to do above and beyond all which we either ask or think. This is why I love this book so much, inside it you will find stories that will draw you in and inspire you to be daring, to be bold and to be adventurous. Pete tells the story of Kelly who believed God was calling her to pray and share the love of Jesus with who live and visit Boy's Town, which is a border town on the Mexican side of the US/Mexico border built on sex and drugs. He tells the story of Jon and Mindy who planted churches in the hippie culture of the west coast and the time when Jon met a man called Porky the Pirate who, as he shared his faith with him, had a 12 bore shotgun pointed at his head which he would fire if he dared to name Jesus one more time. Or the story he tells of Brian and Tracy in the drug, drink, sex fuelled culture on the party island of Ibiza. Paul here in Ephesians 3 and the stories we read in the 24-7 prayer movement call us to be committed, desperate, innovative, persistent, audacious and loving, or in other words to live out the life of Jesus in a way which reflects what Jude is also saying here in verses 24 and 25.

Has Jesus lit a fire in you? Are you willing to be unflinching for him? Reckless for him? Excited for him? This is the soul of these two verses before us. It is also the soul of the Vision Day we had a couple of weeks ago. May we all know there is no mountain high enough for him to stop him fulfilling his purposes in and among us and may we all dare to believe and live this out too.