

The breadth, length, height and depth: Ephesians 3

Sometimes theologians talk about something called the 'Christ-event'.

Why don't they just talk about Jesus?

When we use the expression 'Christ-event' we risk de-emphasising the person of Christ to whom billions of Christians relate as a saviour and friend whom they feel they know.

Instead, the expression emphasises the historical significance of the incarnation of Christ; his ministry; his death; his resurrection and ascension. By thinking of the word of God becoming a person as an 'event' we are more able to ponder the extraordinary historical significance of Jesus, around whose life we may say that all human history pivots.

In the third chapter of his letter to the Ephesians, Paul asks the Ephesians to think about Jesus in this way. He talks about a mystery that God only revealed through Christ; that non-Jews are also fellow heirs of the promise that God made to his people so that all people may have access to God.

Before Christ, this idea that all people might be reconciled with the one true God was kept hidden from humanity, including from God's people. But through Christ, this mystery has now been revealed so that we now know that every family in heaven and earth takes its name and owes its life to Christ.

How does that make us feel?

Today is St George's Day. In memory of a Palestinian saint and martyr there will be numerous expressions of pride in English identity.

I describe myself as English when I meet people from other countries who want to know what I what my identity is. It is the human sub-culture I most closely identify with. By saying that I am English I offer people a sort of short-cut into understanding what my experiences and assumptions might be.

But the identity I take pride in is the one I share with all the people of the earth; I am a man who is reconciled with God through Jesus Christ. It is a wonderful feeling to know that I share this identity with everybody I will ever meet.

Paul prays that the Ephesians will also know this wonderful feeling of bathing in the vastness of this new identity which we all share.

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. (Ephesians 3: 16-19)

What better prayer is there to offer to a brother or sister in Christ?

With these few words, Paul brings the wonderful mystery of the Christ-event into our hearts and we feel the presence of Jesus within us, our saviour and our friend.

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