

- I. Does anyone know what is the heaviest organism on the planet? It is a colony of quaking aspen trees located in Utah scientists have named Pando. Pando weighs roughly 6,600 tons, is 106 acres large, and is also among the oldest living organisms at 80,000 years old.¹ What we can see above ground as individual aspen trees are actually shoots from one central underground root system. Those stems are woven together into one unified organism.
- II. The same is somewhat true of Christians. One cannot be Christian in isolation. Even monks work together, pray together, and live together. While we are not all the same like the aspen tree sprouts of Pando, we are all woven together to be the body of Christ in the world. Paul's letters were written to instruct the early church how to live and love together, and carry out the mission of God in their communities.
- III. I mention this because there are a lot of you and yours in this passage: **you** may be strengthened in **your** inner being; Christ may dwell in **your** hearts through faith, as **you** are being rooted; I pray that **you** may have the power; know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that **you** may be filled.²
- IV. It is possible to read these prayer petitions with the way they have been translated and be led to believe that this passage and Christianity as a whole is all about you. This sort of thinking leads folks to believe their faith is something only for them; that a person's faith should be kept in private, only to be brought out in public on Sunday morning when we worship together. And even then, we can come to view worship as something we do for ourselves. We are renewed for the week ahead, and then go hide our light, and think it can be kept burning through individual study of the Bible, and solitary prayer, but fail to engage the world around us. We focus our sights on the singular view of our personal salvation, and everything else in the world is secondary if it comes into our view at all.
- V. But in reality none of these yous and yours are singular. Paul is not praying for an individual in Ephesus, or an individual here in Tallahassee for that matter, rather he is praying for the united church of Jews and Gentiles in Ephesus that they **collectively** should heed his petitions to God in this prayer, and in so doing know God is able to accomplish abundantly far more than any of them can ask or imagine as individuals.
- VI. In an article from *Relevant*, a Christian magazine, Tyler Edwards writes, "While Walmart or Target might make you feel like they are all about you, the church definitively is not. Hard truth: There's no 'I' in church. Not in the spelling. Not in the mission. Not in the purpose. The church doesn't exist to make you happy, meet your needs, or satisfy your desires...The church is about Jesus. It exists for Jesus."³
- VII. Paul's prayer here in Ephesians is his ultimate hope for the church. And this prayer comes at the intersection of the end of the philosophical and is where Paul turns to the

¹ [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pando_\(tree\)](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pando_(tree))

² Armand J. Hultgren, Lectionary commentary 2009, workingpreacher.org.

³ Tyler Edwards, "There Is No 'I' in Church," *Relevant Magazine*, May 2018.

practical.⁴ He has lived in heady matters for the first three chapters setting the theological foundation for why the church needs to put their faith in Jesus Christ into practice, and what follows are the concrete ways the church is Ephesus should be living out their faith in the risen One.

- VIII. When we make Paul's petitions about ourselves, its easy to get lost, and stray from God which is supposed to be our center. Take love for instance. Human love can wax and wane, it can lead even the most powerful to make awful decisions, just look at David and Bathsheba. David was God's anointed king, yet he succumbed to lust, and pretty much his life went down hill from that moment. History is littered with the faults of those in power who are unable to calm their carnal desires. On the other hand, God's love for us encourages us to look beyond ourselves, to care for others, to make sacrifices without getting something in return. We are to share God's love with others simply because we have known the steadfast love of God. To be rooted in the love of Christ means that we are always look to share the grace and mercy with not only our brothers and sisters in Christ, but all of God's children. It is a love that surpasses all others, even the greatest knowledge in the world.
- IX. I love to read, especially church books. (My teenage self would be appalled by that statement.) I have shelves full of great books on theology, evangelism, mission, church history, liturgy, prayers, commentaries, but without the love of God all of these books are just head trips. If with all this knowledge and faith in Christ, I only lived in the theoretical, I only lived between my ears, and didn't do anything with it this knowledge of God would be worthless. If I didn't share this knowledge in a positive, life giving way with this congregation, with this community, I wouldn't be helping the Kingdom of God at all. Everything we know, everything we believe informs our understanding of God, but if we're not heeding Christ's call to walk the walk by living and sharing his love, what good is all the knowledge we have stored up for ourselves?
- X. Christopher Edmonston served as the preacher at Montreat Youth Conference a few years ago. He was preaching on the parable of the sower. The sower went out and scattered the seed throughout his land: on the path, on the rocks, in the bushes, and in the good fertile soil. Christopher kept asking the conferees, "Montreat, how's your soil?" The seed wasn't good or bad, it was all about the soil. In order to be plants that bear abundant and good fruit we must have good soil; the root system must be established and nourished by the right amounts of nutrients and minerals. Not many plants take root on the path where they are constantly being trampled by foot traffic, or on mountainous rocks, or under the cover of other plants. These are all conditions that would choke out countless plants, but good soil can take even dying plants, and under the right circumstances give them new life.
- XI. The quaking aspen trees of Pandora have been destroyed countless times over its 80,000 year history. Fires have decimated the sprouts, harsh cold weather has driven

⁴ Brian Peterson, *Lectionary Commentary 2015*, workingpreacher.org.

the nutrients needed to survive deep within the root system on other occasions. What is visible to the naked eye has been wiped out, yet the root system sitting in this lush soil continued to produce new growth time and time again. The question I present to you this day is in the same vein of Christopher's question: What are we rooted in?

- XII. Are you rooted in yourself? Do your prayers only concern your wants and needs? Does your idea of thinking about 'the other' only extend as far as your bloodline or church walls? Do you allow your schedule to determine how much time you spend with God in prayer, study, mission, and evangelism, or is it the other way around?
- XIII. Are you rooted in the powers and principalities of this world? Do you neglect to see the world from the viewpoint of those who are not like you? Do you fail to pray that justice would roll down like a mighty river for those who are oppressed and persecuted in the world?
- XIV. Or are we rooted in the love of God? Are we strengthened in the power of the Holy Spirit? Do we allow Christ to dwell in our hearts as we are rooted and ground in love? Do we share the love of Christ that surpasses all other knowledge?
- XV. Make no mistake we are all three. We move back and forth, with our ups and downs as we travel our life of faith. But my hope for us is that we will always return to our one true north, and when we stray we do not go too far one way or the other. This community, the church, as flawed as we might be as individuals, and even at times as a collective, it is here to help remind us of our roots with our Creator in whom we place our ultimate trust. This community is the nucleus of our faith. We build together, we weep together, we pray together, and lift each other up so that we might all bring glory to God over our own name. We reach out to bring others along the journey because we want all to know the grace, love, and fellowship we are rooted in through our Lord and Savior. What if this is what we were about collectively more times than not? What change in the world could we lead? How much further to living into God's vision of the world could we be?
- XVI. While I was in seminary we would always needle our professors, and try to ask them impossible questions, like they hadn't heard them all before and we were the first bunch of inquisitive, and thought provoking students they had ever met. Steve Hayner was the professor for evangelism at the time, he would later serve as the President of Columbia before passing away of cancer a few short years later. I remember asking him, "What do you think heaven will be like?" He smiled and retorted quickly, "I'm too focused on sharing the kingdom of heaven here on earth to think about what heaven will be like." He was always too busy living into the love of Christ to stop and worry about the golden streets of heaven, or who would be waiting for him at the pearly gates.
- XVII. I always think of him when I read this passage because verses 20-21 were his benediction, he used them in the classroom, in worship, at graduation, and they were said at his funeral. "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to

accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

- XVIII. These words have been a reminder for me of the way Steve oriented his life toward God in everything he did, and encouraged his students to do the same as we lived together in seminary and were sent out into congregations.
- XIX. Remember every single day that we are rooted in Christ’s love, we were made to love and glorify God, and that together God can use the church to do more than we could ever ask or imagine.