

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. 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.

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, for ever and ever. Amen.

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Ephesians 3:14-4:3

Not The Way I Planned It: Rooted And

Grounded

They were the rare couple of this time. Unlike so many others, they had saved for retirement. They had made plans, dreamed their dreams and, when they woke up in the morning, shared their dreams, even writing them down. Each of them had worked hard, worked even a year or so beyond retirement age, just to make sure the money would be there. Just to make sure those dreams would come true. Life was comfortable, and the kids got through school and were on their own and soon—soon—**it**

would be the right time. They would travel. They would play together and, at times, apart. Golf, bridge, maybe even learn to ski on the bunny hills at the nearby resort. But that was before, and now it was after.

The first thing she'd noticed had been a change in his smile. The toothy grin was lost; his lips were tighter now. Then—some forgetfulness. He even mentioned it to his doctor, who said it was probably normal for a man that age. But his gait changed, and his posture, just a little at a time, and the always gentle man became sharp-tongued and accusatory. Some paranoia crept in and she insisted—oh, she

was afraid of what she already suspected—but she insisted that he see the specialist the doctor had told her about. The diagnosis was easy; the news was hard. Everything would change. Everything was changing, already, and life would not be the way she had planned it—would not be the way they had dreamed it. The wings of her imagination were clipped; the partnership they had shared all their lives would become, more-and-more, a dependency. And, yes, it was what they had vowed years and years before and she meant it still—for better, for worse, in sickness and in health—but they—she—had hoped for more in these next years of their life

together. She had thought they would soar, but now they would be grounded. They planned to cut loose, but now the very roots they had set down years before would hold her firmly in place. The life they had planned would not be; how do you hold a happy funeral when dreams die young?

Let's pray together.

God we come together today in Your Holy Name, seeking wisdom and asking direction. Guide us as we walk, together, into Your will, and lead us as we seek to live into Your will for us. Give us the bold courage to hear what we may not want to hear and to then walk into this world with heads held

high and arms extended as we reach out to others
and gently life them onto the path that leads to life.

And remind us, we pray, that in all that is said and
done, all that we see and hear, all that becomes clear
as the morning light and all that remains hidden in
the darkness of midnight, the glory of this time and
of these words is Yours, alone. Amen.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians from prison, in
Rome. Paul had long wanted to go to Rome; he just
hadn't planned on being taken as a prisoner. And,
while his life in prison wasn't dungeon-like—he had
some freedoms and was respected--still the last years

of his life were nothing like he had anticipated. His words don't seem to reflect his situation:

...I bow my knees before the Father.... I pray I pray that you may have the power to comprehend... 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. See? Problem solved. Right? So your life isn't

what you wanted it to be. Paul was in prison and, yet, he prayed for the Ephesians, that they would see just how much Christ loved them and be filled with all the "fullness of God." Paul had it worse than you, yet he sucked it up, so I guess you should, too. Right? Wrong. Wrong.

Not that there's anything wrong with being strong in the face of adversity, but the person who tells me to just "man up" isn't doing me any favors. The person who tells you to get over it isn't helping you, either.

First of all, it's not a competition. There's no scale for measuring people's disappointment. Ever see one of those charts that **doctors use** sometimes to let people tell them how much pain they feel; there isn't a scale to measure disappointment. And, even if we could, what good would it do to say, "Well, Sally didn't get to go to the birthday party but Jimmy lost TV for the whole weekend, so Sally

should be happy the party was only Saturday afternoon.” Our troubles are our troubles and how much they hurt usually depends on other circumstances.

Second, though, is that we experience things—we feel—each in his or her own way. We watched a movie the other evening that was a great example. Maybe you saw this movie, but not many people did; that’s what happens when you try to compete with both James Bond and Charlie Brown. Anyway, the movie is about a family—the Coopers—and a couple—the parents, played by Diane Keaton and John Goodman. It’s going to be the last family

Christmas; the Coopers are going to divorce but, first, they want their family to experience one more family Christmas. After the holidays, they'll make the announcement to their daughter, Eleanor, and their son, Hank. The spark is gone; there's no magic, no romance. The symbol of the failure of their marriage is the trip they've always wanted to take, a journey to Africa, the trip they've had to postpone in the past but which, now, they are free to take. There's only one problem; Mrs. Cooper has no interest in going. Or in much of anything else having to do with her husband. Something has changed and, though neither of them can put a finger

on it, they recognize that she worries excessively about the adult children and the grandkids and feels root-bound, just at the time of their life when they could pick up and go and do and have fun together.

Now, it's schmaltzy and predictable, of course, but as the movie winds down, Mrs. Cooper suddenly realizes just how much she still loves Mr. Cooper and wants to be with him for the rest of her life and tells him, of course she'll go to Africa with him.

The kids'll be okay on their own, won't they? And, as in any romantic comedy, the movie ends with both happiness and an ironic twist. Mr. Cooper is thrilled—yes, she loves me and she'll go; but, in his

moment of joy, he also breaks the news to his wife that her worry has been justified, after all. Their son, Hank, has lost his job and, once more, Africa must be put on hold so they can stay and help him with his bills, his child support and his self-esteem. They laugh together as the credits roll.

We can't always laugh off our disappointments, though; life doesn't go as planned and we find ourselves stuck in the same old place, rooted and grounded as we never intended to be, and nothing tells us that things will get better.

Rooted and grounded. Those are Paul's words. He prays that Christ will dwell in our hearts as we

are being rooted and grounded in love. But, sometimes, we feel that we have been unfairly rooted in the place we hoped to escape and grounded from flight like birds whose wings are clipped to keep them at home. What are we to do—how are we to respond—when all that we have dreamed of, worked toward and planned so carefully for becomes the stuff of regret?

You know the expression, “where one door closes, another opens,” or another one--“when the door closes, run to the next window”? Yeah, I don’t like those, either. They’re fluff—easy grace—ways of evading the reality of the real pain and sense of

loss our neighbor is sharing with us. When a door closes—especially the one we have focused on and worked toward and sacrificed to reach for a long, long time—we feel trapped and we feel...cheated. It hurts, and the pain isn't the kind that gets laughed away at the end of a romantic comedy.

Life goes on. We find ourselves continuing to breathe, our hearts still beating, as the sun comes up the next day and our eyes eventually flutter open again. The disappointment still floods our feelings, but the dog has to go out or we need to get up and—well, you know.

How do we deal with the disappointment of being rooted and grounded, right where we are, unable to pursue our dreams? I wish I had an easy answer. When life doesn't go the way we planned it and everything we have worked toward is tossed aside—where do we find an open door or, at least, a window that isn't painted shut?

I suppose Paul isn't a bad example. His life had already taken a major turn when he had met the resurrected Christ along the road to Damascus; instead of persecuting Christians, which was his life's work—and he didn't seem to mind at all-- he had become an Apostle of Jesus and worked

tirelessly to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles of the Mediterranean basin. He dreamed of going to Rome, to meet those bold and brave people who lived together, following Jesus, right under the nose of the Roman Emperor. What a culmination to his career it would be to spend his days among people of such faith. Instead, he was tricked and trapped in Jerusalem and placed under arrest; only because he appealed his sentence to the Emperor, was he transported to Rome. But he was a prisoner; he could not interact freely with the courageous Christians of the city. He had worked so hard to get there, but not like this. What did he do?

The first thing we know of is that he reached out to others. Four of his letters—to the Ephesians, to the Colossians, to the Philippians and to his friend and co-worker, Philemon—these letters were written from Paul’s prison cell. In each of these letters, Paul mentioned his chains; his imprisonment was never out of his mind and he shared very matter-of-factly that he was not free.

The next thing is that Paul prayed; our Scripture passage today has been referred to as an “overheard prayer.” Of course, given that Paul wrote it in a letter, it’s fair to say he wanted it to be heard. He prays this way:

I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you (you see, he is praying for others, and not just for himself) 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 (**you**) may be filled with all the fullness of God.

How hard to pray for others when you are in the midst of difficulties of your own? How difficult it is to see the needs of others when we are overwhelmed with our disappointments and fears. And yet—and

yet—it may be therapeutic. Remember what I said; it isn't a competition. You needn't look at the people around you and confess that some have it worse than you; you needn't say, "Well, I have no right to complain, for Joe and Betty have lost more than we have." No, you have every right to feel the way you feel; in your disappointment, though, it may be helpful for you to raise not only your own sorrow to God but to life up another, as well.

Connect with them as you connect with God.

Listen to how Paul concluded this prayer, too:

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, for ever and ever. Amen.

God can accomplish more than we can ask or even imagine. Paul may have believed that his situation was bleak, just as our own situations seem bleak when our dreams are dashed and our plans are made impossible; still, Paul allowed for the fact—do you allow that it is fact—that God is able to accomplish more than we can ask or even imagine. Expand the circle of your dreams; that’s what he tells us. Maybe God won’t accomplish what we would really like to see, but, still, Paul expressed faith in God’s ability to “accomplish abundantly far

more than all we can ask or imagine.” Abundantly far more. Not just a little bit more. Not just what we can ask for. Not merely what we can dream or imagine. No—more. Not just a little more. Not just far more. Not merely abundantly more. No—God, he says, can accomplish abundantly far more than we can ask, abundantly far more than we can imagine. Stand back. Look. Watch. Be ready.

Abundantly far more than you can ask or imagine is at hand! These are the words of an innocent man in his prison cell in ancient Rome. Let us, then, remain open to the possibilities that God may yet act in our own lives.

Paul, in the heartbreak of his own shattered dreams, encouraged others and, then, began to dream anew. He urged them—he urges us today:

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

How can we encourage others, when we are at the brink of discouragement? What do we have to give to others when we have this lingering sensation that what was most important to us has been taken away? How do we find the boldness to dream

anew? Bear with me while I share a story that might—might—get us to an understanding.

Chiquinho Scarpa—I can only hope that I'm pronouncing his name correctly—he's a Brazilian man, about my age. A few years ago, he bought a new car—a \$500,000 Bentley. And he publicly announced that he was going to bury the Bentley so that, when he died, the car would be available for him to drive in the afterlife. See—he's going to bury this beautiful, incredible, expensive car so he can drive it in heaven. An uproar arose—the stupidity, the arrogance, the waste; mostly, the waste. Sell the car; give it away. Don't bury the

car. And, in truth, Mr. Scarpa knew that what he was proposing didn't make much sense; it made perfect sense. Because, when the outrage had reached fever pitch, Mr. Scarpa revealed that it had all been a hoax. It was a hoax—sort of. Really, it was a scheme to get attention. Not for himself, but for a cause that was dear to him—organ donation. Why waste a perfectly good Bentley? That's what people were asking of him. Why take something with you that you can't use, but someone else could? His response--why waste a perfectly good heart, or kidney, or liver? If you wouldn't bury your new car—everybody knows you won't be using that car

in heaven—why bury your perfectly good lungs?

You won't be using those in heaven, either.

Of course organ donation is important, but that's not the point, not this morning. Don't bury your dreams; don't waste a perfectly good dream.

Instead—instead—help your dreams to be achieved, if only by others. Give it away. Got a ticket to sail to **Greece**? Give it away. Got a college fund that isn't going to be used? Give it away. Got a dream?

There are so many people around you—some of them right here in this church, lots of them in our neighborhood, some you'd never imagine—so many people don't have a dream. So many are caught up

in lives too busy or too worrisome or too oppressed for dreams; so many have no time to dream even in their sleep. Share yours. **Share your dreams and then share the way to make those dreams come true.**

Replant your dreams in someone else; let them take root. Let them be grounded elsewhere.

But then, remember Paul's words. Remember what he wrote about God. Remember that he said this for the Ephesians and for you and for me: the power at work within us—the power of our God—is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine. Dream anew. Draw a bigger circle around what you believe is possible. Increase

the size of your body of friends and family; care more and care about more. We are never—never—too old, or too lonely, or too disappointed to set another goal or to dream a new dream. God can accomplish “abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine.”

It hurts when dreams die; it is a reason to grieve and to mourn when all that we have worked for and striven toward escapes our grasp. But we can share those dreams and give them new life. And, once we do, we can begin to dream anew. Become rooted and grounded in His love—seek His blessed

assurance. And know that, with God, all things are possible. Amen.