

**THE PSALTER Psalm 139:1-9, 26**

<sup>1</sup> O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,  
for his steadfast love endures forever.  
<sup>2</sup> O give thanks to the God of gods,  
for his steadfast love endures forever.  
<sup>3</sup> O give thanks to the Lord of lords,  
for his steadfast love endures forever;  
<sup>4</sup> who alone does great wonders,  
for his steadfast love endures forever;  
<sup>5</sup> who by understanding made the heavens,  
for his steadfast love endures forever;

<sup>6</sup> who spread out the earth on the waters,  
for his steadfast love endures forever;  
<sup>7</sup> who made the great lights,  
for his steadfast love endures forever;  
<sup>8</sup> the sun to rule over the day,  
for his steadfast love endures forever;  
<sup>9</sup> the moon and stars to rule over the night,  
for his steadfast love endures forever;  
<sup>26</sup> O give thanks to the God of heaven,  
for his steadfast love endures forever.

**Ephesians 3:14-21, New International Version (NIV)**

<sup>14</sup> For this reason I kneel before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. <sup>16</sup> I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, **to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge —that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.**

<sup>20</sup> Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

**John 6:16-21 (NRSV)**

<sup>16</sup> When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, <sup>17</sup> got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. <sup>18</sup> The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. <sup>19</sup> When they had rowed about three or four miles,<sup>[a]</sup> they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. <sup>20</sup> But he said to them, "It is I;<sup>[b]</sup> do not be afraid." <sup>21</sup> Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

**Footnotes:**

- a. [John 6:19](#) Gk about twenty-five or thirty stadia
- b. [John 6:20](#) Gk I am

Once upon a time, there lived a young man. He was a good man. You would have liked him. He was a good guy. He did nice things for people. He was thoughtful to his family. He shared what he had with others. A good man, right?

At the end of each day, he would take a walk down the country lane to a small secluded pool of water hidden in a bit of brush where he would take off his shoes and socks and wash his feet. It was a time of peaceful quiet and he looked forward to it at the end of each day—especially on those days when he had been terribly busy.

Wading around in his little hidden pool he grasped the stones with his toes; he kicked up the water so that it wet the cuffs of his trousers; he laughed to himself; he sighed aloud. He breathed a little bit deeper, smiled a little broader, and walked home refreshed.

Each day he journeyed down to his pool of still waters and found himself refreshed before going home again. His pool was good to him and he hardly knew how he would ever do without it.

But then one night the wind blew up, the trees shook branches loose; and the rain beat down on the roof of his house and dripped down into the bucket set in the corner of the young man's kitchen. It stormed all night, but by daybreak the rain subsided and the wind blew away the remaining clouds, leaving behind a crystal blue sky. And the young man—being a good guy—spent that beautiful day doing nice things for people and was thoughtful to his family. He shared his lunch with a homeless man and gave his sweater to an old woman sitting on her porch swing.

And at the end of the day he did what he always did. He walked down the country lane to his small secluded pool of water anxious to take his shoes and socks off and wash his feet, and play with the stones and kick up the water and laugh and sigh and breathe a little bit deeper, and smile a little broader and walk home refreshed. *But this day*, as he pushed away the brush that hid his pool from the view of the road, what he found made his jaw drop open and he froze at the water's edge. You see, the storm had caused the far shore of his little pool to wash away and in its place was the mouth of a *great sea—too wide* for him to see across! But he could just make out where the other side of his little pool had been and that made him

confident enough to wade in that day—staying carefully inside the dimensions of his little pool.

He felt the stones between his toes and he splashed around a bit. But his laugh was a little forced and his breath was still shallow when he stepped back out again, although he convinced himself that he was still refreshed. He went home and came back again the next day and the next day and the next day...

This went on for several more days until *that one day*. You know, that one day. It's the one day that everything really changes. It was that one day that he received his *first visitor*—but *not* from the *road*; it was from the sea! And the visitor from the sea was a *mermaid*! (Hey, you can't make this stuff up!)

She greeted him warmly and he returned the greeting cautiously. And then she asked him a question. She asked, "I have seen you come here for several days now and I am wondering why it is that you stay so close to the shore, and stand in such shallow water and do not venture out further into the big beautiful sea?" To which he answered, "I am not standing in the sea; I am wading in my little pool." The mermaid looked more closely. "What pool?" she asked. The young man swung his arm in a wide arc and said, "Well, right here, of course!" as if it should be ever so obvious. The mermaid looked hard but remained unconvinced. Nevertheless she asked him, "Why do you come to this 'pool'." To which he replied, "I come here to be refreshed after a long day of service,"

"But now you can see the sea, yes?" she asked. "Well, yes. I can," he replied. "Then why don't you now come out into this beautiful, big, vast, expansive sea and swim with me? It is so refreshing and revitalizing. It goes on farther than the eye can see and is deeper than the fish can swim and its power goes on forever in every direction. Surely if you swam out here with me you would be more refreshed than you have ever been and more prepared for service than you ever could hope to be." The young man looked at her, unsure. "What is this power you speak of?" he finally asked.

"Ah!" she replied, "When you swim out here in this great sea, you will feel a joy that is beyond any joy you have ever experienced."

“How can that be?” he responded. “How does this joy feel different then what I have already experienced in my little pool?”

The mermaid replied, “There is only one way to find out. You must dive in and experience it yourself. That is all I can tell you.” With that, she leaped into the air then dove into the sea with a great splash, leaving the man alone in his little pool.

And the young man stood there and he thought and he thought and he thought. And, together here this morning, we do not yet know what his answer will be...

But having heard this story, now let's listen again to part of the passage from Ephesians that we heard this morning. Just a piece of this letter to the people of Ephesus—a letter written over 1900 years ago. Listen closely!

“I pray,” says Paul, “that you, being rooted and established in love,<sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, **to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,<sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge**—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” Again: That you may, “**grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.**” (NIV)

Catch this — because it is BIGGER than you are thinking. It is challenging, but try to grasp the Cosmic Dimensions of Christ's love and in so doing, that you may be *completely filled with the very nature of God!*

I have been swimming in these verses all week and it has forced me to question: How much of Christ's love am I living into? How much of Christ's love are *you* living into? *All of it?*

I suspect most of us—even most people around the whole world, live into only a small pool of Christ's love. Like the young man in our story this morning, we have become *so familiar* with the small pool of Christ's love that we live in that we forget, or perhaps have *never even known* that there is *so much more of it* just waiting for us!

This love—although it can never be fully known—as the scripture tells us, has a breadth and a width and a depths and height beyond anything we have allowed ourselves to experience. Why is that? Is it because the pool that we are in already is “good enough”...and *manageable* and *knowable*. That comforts us. This *good and manageable, knowable* love of Christ.

But what about this love that surpasses all knowledge? Do we seek it out? Or is it too risky to leave the pool we have found comfort in so far?

Can I tell you that it is not enough? *Our little pools are not enough.* As we reach further, as we take the risk—have the faith—to dive in deeper we can begin to experience a love that transforms *ourselves*, that enables us to live life more fully, *and* that enables us to live God's love in the world more fully for the transformation of *others*.

Imagine what the world would be like if *we all lived more fully* into this love? Would all the school shootings have happened this year—if the gunman had experienced the depth of Christ's love? Would we fight so many wars—if leaders and nations had experienced the height of Christ's love? Would families suffer so much if we lived in the length of Christ's love? Would each of us suffer the dark nights of our soul so deeply if we took in the breadth of Christ's love?

As humans we look to people for love. We look to our animals for love. There are those in this life that have loved us well. In so doing they reflect God's love for us.

But each and every one of us fails another at some point in our lives. We are not the perfect partner, the perfect child, the perfect parent, the perfect friend. Likewise our partners, our children, our parents, our friends have not loved us perfectly. Even our animals, who lavish us with love, will eat our plants, will piddle in the house, will scratch the furniture, will chase a skunk, will roll in the mud...in short—will fail to love us perfectly. And it's this imperfect love that wounds us. We count on people who fail us; we trust people who misuse us; we love people who leave us.

The problem we encounter is that we then erroneously determine the measure of God's love for us by how we have been loved by *people*. Benedictine sister Joan Chittister articulates this well. She writes, "When we are vengeful, we tell tall tales of an angry God. When we are sick with our own sin, we find ourselves a God of mercy. When we are pressed down, face in the sand, we know what a God of Justice is all about. (But) Is this God? (she asks us) Or is God the measure of how deep our smallness goes, how great our parching thirst for love? Surely God is all of this. *And more* (my emphasis). The more?. (my punctuation) we cannot in our smallness and our thirst even begin to imagine." (*Called to Question: a spiritual memoir*, page 8.)

*But I believe we are supposed to try to imagine.* I believe we are supposed to be brave and step out of our little pools into the bigger ocean of God's love and experience as much of it as we can. I believe that is what Paul is challenging us to do in this letter. I don't know about you but I need that bigger love in the dark nights of my soul. It's what keeps me from being swallowed up by the darkness. I need that bigger love when my loved ones die. I need it when I read about the next senseless murder-suicide in the paper. I need it when pleasure boats overturn in the Great Lakes and wild fires take the lives of those in harm's way *and* those who went to save them. I need it like Jesus' disciples needed it when the storms of life suddenly swell up around me. As I mourn my losses and the world's losses, here's where I find comfort: I find it in the knowledge that these have all entered into God's expansive, cosmic love that we cannot fully grasp, that we see only dimly.

The further we dive into God's love, the greater healing we experience. The further we dive into God's love, the more fully we live our lives. The further we dive into God's love, the more fully we express God's love in the world. *So do we dive in?*

When we left our story this morning we left the young man thinking and thinking and thinking—unsure whether he was willing to leave his little pool of love to dive into God's vast love which breadth, length, height and depth are impossible to completely fathom. We won't know his decision. We can only know our own. What will your answer be? My advice? *Dive!*

Blessings on the journey. Amen.