

# St. Augustine's Sermons

Calgary, Alberta

The Rev. Jonathan Gibson

**The Doxological Church**

8:30 am, Holy Communion

10:30 am Holy Communion

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## **The Text: Ephesians 3:14-21**

*14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

*20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

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I am grateful that so many of you have come to worship this morning and have also agreed to stay for the congregational meeting later today. As we gather together in this Eucharist I am pleased that we have heard this text from Ephesians chapter 3. Here is a passage that comes at the end of the first division of this letter, which focuses on two things. The first is the measureless dimensions of the love of Christ. The second is the immensity of God's power, made available for us who believe. This morning I am not going to concentrate on this part of the passage. This is because there is enough to be said that is needed by considering only verse 21.

We are in a season where the waters are very unsettled for those who are Anglican Christians in Canada. The seas are stormy. At a time

such as this, verse 21 of Ephesians chapter 3 is like a steady ship that can chart a course through such turbulent waters. This is a verse that contains a vision of the Church that is to inspire and stir us to see with the Apostle the possibility that is before us in a season of such swelling seas.

### **Paul's Magnificent Doxology**

What is possible for us at this time is we can claim our calling as church that is doxological in how we live. Verse 21 provides for us the shape of what I mean about being a doxological church. It reads:

To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Paul's spirit is soaring in prayer, as he closes this first half of his letter with a magnificent doxology.

As you may have gathered by now "doxological" is an adjective qualifying the noun "church." To be a church that is doxological means that this is to be a congregation where doxology informs who we are. So what is a doxology? This one word comes from two Greek words: "Doxa" and "logos".

"Doxa" means "glory" and "logos" means "word". Therefore a doxology, is a word, or words of glory, intended to magnify God. To be a doxological church means that we are to be a gathering of people whose only purpose is to magnify God. There are four phrases in this verse that show us how this is to be lived out. Let us look at them now.

#### **1. "To him be glory . . . "**

The glory of God is the beauty and brightness of his infinite perfections. When your heart breaks out in the words, "Glory to God," it's like a hockey team celebrating after winning the Stanley Cup as they pour Champaign over the head of their coach in sheer joy and exhilaration. Or it is like a standing ovation at the Jack Singer Concert Hall after a stirring orchestral number. Or it is like the waving and cheers of the crowds on the docks as the battleship comes home after victory.

It is an expression of unrestrained celebration because what was worked towards and hoped for has become really present to those caught up in the glory. When glory is known we are taken out of ourselves and transported to another place.

There is in the heart of every child and teenager and adult the need and longing to sing a doxology. We may sing it more lustily to athletes or rock stars or architecture or space technology or politicians or white peaked mountain majesties, than we do to God. But there is no denying that the doxology is there in every heart. We were made to worship and sing. We were made to have a hero to brag about. Idolatry happens when our foremost hero is other than God. True worship happens when the church is a doxological community, and the one we brag about is the God made known to us in Jesus Christ.

The main reason people feel awkward about singing or shouting glory to God is simply that he is not as real to them as Mikka Kippersoff or Jerome Iginla, Elton John or Queen Elizabeth. But as we understand the significance of what Paul is saying, I think it is his hope that we will know the real presence of God so that he is brought into view in a way that surpasses the superstardom of an athlete, actor, royalty or a pop star.

So the meaning of doxology is clear to anyone who has ever admired anything. We have all done it. But the experience of having your heart soar in admiration to GOD depends on whether you have ears to hear and eyes to see that above and behind every admirable thing on earth stands the magnificence and beauty God.

Paul's admiration for God was boundless. And so at the end of these three chapters he sings a doxology because the beauty and brightness of God's infinite perfections consumed Paul's mind and heart.

## **2. "To him be glory in the church . . . "**

To Jerome Iginla be glory in the Saddledome. To Roberto Minczuk and the CPO be glory in Jack Singer, to Daniel Day Lewis and Marion Cotillard be glory at the Oscars. But to God be glory in the church. Look at verse 10 to see how Paul conceives the church as the theater of the glory of God: the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things is "that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places."

The reason God created the world and called the church into being is so that he would have a sufficiently diversified yet unified system of mirrors with which to reflect the glory of his many-sided wisdom to the universe. St. Augustine's is a local expression of this universal church. Our destiny, therefore, is to be a corporate and visible and audible doxology to God. Oh do you see the significance of what it means to be part of the Church of Jesus Christ? That while we are but one small community we are part of a community that for two thousand years in every conceivable culture has been called to live for God's glory.

I want you to be inspired and enthused this morning to think through what it will mean for us to say our hero is none other than Jesus. I believe that all we are going to be discussing this week and next and all the pains that we are facing within the Anglican Church at present is to bring us into a place where we can become a more clearly articulate corporate doxology to God.

When people choose to live with a greater passion for Jesus, this is often accentuated with times where there are trials and opportunity. The trial comes when we are misunderstood or mis-represented. The opportunity comes as we are called into a deeper consideration of what it means to call ourselves Christians. We are living in a generation where this is exactly what I believe we are called to anticipate as we seek the Lord's will at this critical time.

### **3. "To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus . . . "**

If the church is the theater in which the principalities and powers of the universe are to see the glory of God's manifold wisdom, then Jesus Christ is the embodiment of that wisdom and the main character in the drama played out in the theater of the church. The way the church glorifies God is by simply providing an arena in which the work of Jesus Christ can take effect.

And here is the issue that has so plagued the church for 2000 years and why I believe we are divided at present. We need to recognize that the only stage in the world that will give glory to God and to Jesus Christ is the stage called the Church. If you were to look back over those times in church history when there has been the greatest controversy it always has to do with Jesus and the words used to declare who Jesus is.

St. Athanasius in the fourth century, Martin Luther, John Calvin in the 16th century, George Whitfield and John Wesley in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Deitrich Bonhoeffer in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century gave their all because they believed that the church of their generation was not the kind of doxological community the Bible called them to be and to become.

So while reformation is painful and costly, because it calls into question the status quo of the established religious structures, it is also life giving. This is because it brings us into a place where we understand more clearly why we believe what we do and why the words we use to express our belief need to be measured carefully.

Yes there will always be critics who will ask why get so hung up on words? I would answer them in the following way:

The words we use to describe Jesus truly matter because our speech is to be a doxology. Church speech is to be governed by glory words. When the church chooses to diminish and change the language it uses to speak about Jesus we are no longer giving glory to Jesus. Instead we are misrepresenting him.

So here is one of the problems. We expect Jesus to be misrepresented in the world but not in the church. But because the Prince of the Ruler of the Air, also known as, the Devil, does his best work covertly, he will often choose the church as the place to do his most effective work. This was even so during the ministry of the Apostle Paul.

Listen to these words from 2 Corinthians 11, verses 12 and following:

12 And what I do I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. 13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

This calls us to be clear about what is at stake today. It is this very struggle that is taking place in the Anglican Church and we are asked to consider the question: where will we stand? To be a doxological community requires of us that we will give glory to Jesus in the Church by representing him in keeping with what the New Testament says. To hear what the New Testament teaches in 2 Corinthians means that we

have to be able to soberly admit that within the Anglican Church today there are those who disguise themselves as servants of righteousness when in fact they are servants of Satan.

This is strong language which I admit is difficult to say publicly. But if Paul was able to name it in his own day we need to be able to do the same in our day.

**4. "To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations for ever and ever. Amen."**

I want to read to you what Napoleon Bonaparte said of Jesus:

"I know men and I tell you, Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between him and every other person in the world there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded his empire upon love; and at this hour, millions would die for him."

"I search in vain history to find similar to Jesus Christ, or anything which can approach the gospel. Neither history nor humanity, nor ages, nor nature, offer me anything with which I am able to compare it or to explain it. Here everything is extraordinary."

Here was H.G. Well's estimation of Jesus:

"I am a historian, I am not a believer, but I must confess as a historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very center of history. Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all history."

"Christ is the most unique person of history. No man can write a history of the human race without giving first and foremost place to the penniless teacher of Nazareth."

And lastly let us hear from Kenneth Scott Latourette, former President of American Historic Society and author of a two-volume *History of Christianity*:

"It is evidence of His importance, of the effect that He has had upon history and presumably, of the baffling mystery of His being that no other life ever lived on this planet has evoked so huge a volume of

literature among so many people and languages, and that, far from ebbing, the flood continues to mount."

"As the centuries pass by, the evidence is accumulating that measured by its effect on history, Jesus is the most influential life ever lived on this planet. The influence appears to be mounting." "No other life lived on this planet has so widely and deeply affected mankind."

What does Paul say? "To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations for ever and ever. Amen" and why so these three men, who lived in from in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries agree, even though two of them were not Christians?

Here is the thing about Jesus. Because of who he is he will be glorified in every generation. The greatest of people, the most admirable of men and women are only meteors in the sky of history. They last about a third of a second and then are gone. But God is like the sun. And generation after generation he rises on the just and the unjust and never fades in his glory. "To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to THROUGHOUT ALL GENERATIONS, FOR EVER AND EVER. Amen."

That's what we mean when we sing the Gloria: "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost: as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen." The glory of God will fill the world with his glory as the waters cover the sea, and it will be a world of glory without end, to all generations forever and ever. Amen!

As we consider later today and next week the important issues that are before us let us keep before us this verse from the end of Ephesians chapter 3. We are called in this day to be a doxological church where as we see this congregation as a stage on which we are giving glory to God and to Christ Jesus we will ever more fully live out our true calling.

You know what I believe will happen as we seek him and glorify him in this way? We will experience a more manifest showing of His presence, whereby we will see how his power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.

I am filled with a sense of hope for the future and joy for today because as we consider the path before us as a congregation within the larger Anglican Church, God will shape within us a heart that will

want to express our love for him more because we will affirm: Yes, we too need a hero and our hero is Jesus Christ, who so shows us the Father in the Power of the Holy Spirit we join with Paul in singing:

*Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

*Let us sing and then pray:*

Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;  
Praise Him, all creatures here below;  
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.