

Pump Up the Volume

July 26, 2009

(Pentecost 8 – Year B)

Ephesians 3: 14-21

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

I must admit that when I was in high school, my favorite subject was math. And I especially liked geometry.

I think that I liked geometry the best because I could see and experience the problems and the solutions.

In geometry, you can use angles to calculate the area of triangles.

In geometry, you multiply the height and the width and the length of an object to arrive at its volume.

The Apostle Paul in his Letter to the Ephesians uses the language of geometry to describe the fullness and the volume of Jesus' love for us.

Paul writes this in his letter:

“I pray that you may have the power to comprehend...

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.”

Paul prays that we will know the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ's love.

Paul prays that we will have the power to comprehend that the love of Christ is overflowing and full and voluminous.

Many of you know that I spent this last week as the summer camp director for a session of 3rd and 4th grade campers at Camp Allen.

Susan and I do this every summer.

I am the session director, providing a spiritual component and presence.

And Susan works in the arts and crafts area.

It is a great week of ministry for both of us.

Part of the nighttime routine of camp is to end the evening with milk and cookies with the kids.

The 62 kids, along with their teen-aged counselors and the college-aged senior staff, gather in the dining hall after dark.

Then we have a short time of worship, as a senior staff person leads us with his guitar in a few songs of worship.

Last Thursday night, we all gathered in the dining hall for our evening program.

We had gathered after the all-camp dance, so the campers were rowdy and boisterous.

They ate their cookies and drank their milk and chattered away.

Then, we lowered the lights in the dining hall.

The guitar began to play a contemporary worship song that the kids had learned earlier in the day.

The voices of these children hushed and quieted as they sang together:

“Here I am to worship.

Here I am to bow down.

Here I am to say that you’re my God.”

I sang along with the kids.

But then my voice became silent.

I had stopped singing, so that I could listen to the voices of children in worship.

And as I closed my eyes and heard the strong voices of those children, lifted up in worship,

My heart felt the love of Jesus,

My eyes began to water and tear up in this amazing moment of worship.

And through the voices of children, I received power to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of the fullness and the volume of God.

The Apostle Paul prays for us in his letter to the Ephesians,

That we will know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,

So that we may be filled with the fullness of God.

Last Thursday night, as I worshipped in the dining hall at Camp Allen,

I listened to the voices of worshipping children,
And I was filled with the voluminous fullness of God,
The fullness of love that geometry cannot calculate.
The fullness that surpasses knowledge.

I know that for many of us,
We want to be able to figure out the love of Jesus with our intellect.
We want to use a geometric formula that is height times width times length
equals volume.
Yet, the Apostle Paul prays for us, that we will know that we are loved, not
based upon knowledge, but based upon the mysterious experience of
love.

In the 1700s, an Anglican priest from England named John Wesley tried to
calculate the volume of God's love using geometric formulas and
knowledge.

John Wesley was educated at Oxford University.

John Wesley joined a "holy club" of men who tried to learn all they could
about Christianity and the Bible.

Yet Wesley's ministry was flat and he became frustrated.

Then, on May 24, 1738, John Wesley had an experience that changed
everything.

He described the event in his journal this way:

"In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street,
where [some]one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the
Romans.

About a quarter after 9 o'clock, while he was describing the change which
God works in the heart through faith in Christ,

I felt my heart strangely warmed.

I felt that I did trust in Christ, and an assurance was given me that [Christ] had
taken away my sins."

John Wesley later went on to reform the Church of England, initiating a series
of methods, methods of small group Bible study and spiritual formation.

John Wesley's methods of experiencing God's love later became the basis for a new Christian denomination: the Method-ists, the Methodist Church.

As John Wesley heard teaching on the Book of Romans,
His heart was strangely warmed as he felt the love of Jesus,
And he received the power to comprehend the breadth and length and height
and depth of the fullness of the volume of God.

Here at St. Alban's Episcopal Church, we are not here just to teach you
geometric formulas about God.

Here at St. Alban's, we create an environment of worship and of teaching so
that you may experience and know the love of God, not just with your
minds, but in your hearts.

Here at St. Alban's, people experience the breadth and length and height and
depth of the overflowing volume of God's love for them.

When I was at camp last week, in the shower stall in the staff's quarters, there
were several different shampoo bottles laying all around.

One of the shampoo bottles that I saw in the shower stall had an interesting
description on it.

The shampoo advertised itself as "volumizing shampoo."

Since I am a person who could certainly use some more volume to my hair, I
was curious about this volumizing shampoo.

I tried this volumizing shampoo yesterday morning.

And can't you tell a big difference!

However, the Apostle Paul knows that a no volumizing shampoo can increase
the volume of God's love for us.

No geometric formula can be used to compute the volume of God's love for
us.

However, if we will close our eyes and be silent during worship, then we can
listen to the strong voices around us - and know the love of Christ that
surpasses knowledge.

If we will read the Bible, not just to study it, but to be changed by those
words, then our hearts will be strangely warmed.

So, like the Apostle Paul, I pray that your hearts will be filled the fullness of
God.

I pray that you will experience the volumizing love of Jesus that surpasses
knowledge.

I pray that, in your heart, God will - pump up the volume.

AMEN.

© The Rev. Jeff W. Fisher, 2009