



“The Power at Work Within”

I thought we would stay with the letter to the Ephesians this week. This small selection from the letter is packed full of inspiration. The writer is encouraging his readers to discover the full extent of their inner power to make a difference in the world. He prays that these folks might be “strengthened in (their) inner being with power through God’s Spirit” (3:16).

A colleague in ministry from the United Church of Christ, the Rev. Dr. Tom Thrasher paid our church a visit this past week. We have a small group of people who meet informally to discuss evolutionary Christian spirituality. Having checked out our website, Tom was interested in what Canadian Memorial was doing. It turns out that the congregation he serves in Suquamish, Washington are doing some similar things. In particular he was fascinated by our Purpose of practicing and teaching evolutionary Christian spirituality. One of the things Tom shared with us is how he helped his community draw a map of all the programs their church is offering. He used an Integral Map, based on the work of philosopher Ken Wilber.

Without going into detail, at the most basic level this map locates human experience within four basic world-spaces or perspectives. In other

words all of what we call “reality” arises in, as, and through these perspectives. They are basically the consciousness of the individual or the “I” space, the shared meanings that arise between individuals, or the “We” space, the realm of nature, the “It” space, and the realm of social, political, economic systems. An even more succinct way of saying this is that all occasions can be viewed through the “I”, the “We”, and the “It”.

So, he made this spiffy map, placing on it all the programs his congregation offered. After his church placed all of the programs on this map, they discovered an interesting thing. The most under-populated space was the “I” space. This space relates to personal growth, transformation of consciousness, and growing in spiritual intelligence. They were doing lots in the “we” space, and lots in the “it” space, but not much inner growth work in the “I” space. I guess not much has changed in 2000 years since the letter to the Ephesians was written, because this is precisely what the writer of the letter was praying for:

“I pray that God may grant you to be strengthened in your inner being with the power of God’s spirit”.

Our inner being is where Christ shows up *as* self and *in* self. How are

you doing, how are *we* doing, with being strengthened in our inner being? Are we continuing to neglect this dimension of our existence? You could take some time and do an inventory for yourself of how much time you spend strengthening your inner being. Here's a partial list of practices that would be associated with this "I" space:

Prayer and meditation; spiritual direction; doing a moral inventory; reading philosophy and spirituality; any practice that helps you to intentionally watch with curiosity, but without judgment, your own mind and emotions; personal therapy; doing "shadow work" – making conscious what is unconscious; identifying underlying assumptions that shape your worldview, to name just a few.

The truth is that we live in an age is all about doing, and not our being strengthened in our inner being. There is certainly lots to do – make a career, spend time with family, making time for your primary relationships, cultivate friendships – all these are important activities. But then when you add things in like shopping, entertainment, planning holidays, making time for hobbies, and most importantly, lowering your golf handicap, there typically isn't a lot of time leftover to "strengthen your inner being with power" – unless you make time for it.

In the 21st century, the church needs to give equal attention to this "I" space. We need to become a habitat for people to discover spiritual

power. The goal of attending to our inner being is a particular kind of power according to the writer of the letter. It's the power of love, known in Christ. He wants us to comprehend the length and breadth and height and depth of Christ's love so that we may be filled with *fullness of God*.

The Dimensions of Christ's Love

Notice the dimensions that are used. They can be placed on a cross. If you think about the cross as a symbol of life in Christ, there is the vertical dimension, with height and depth, and a horizontal dimension, indicating the length and breadth of Christ's love. The vertical dimension can be imagined to be the stages of spiritual ascent – all the great mystics speak of this ascent. As we ascend through increasingly complex stages, our inner being is strengthened – we become more resilient, more adaptive and flexible, and are able to take increasingly expanded perspectives. Through us, Spirit is able to see and feel and imagine ever more brilliant futures.

As we ascend, each emergent stage of consciousness includes what went before but is able to see reality through a heightened perspective. When we engage in practices in the "I" space, whether it's meditation, spiritual direction, personal therapy or shadow work, what can happen is that a little sky light forms in our awareness, and we begin to get glimpses of a world above us that we didn't even know existed. That new world had been literally "above our head". As we enter

and integrate this new world, what we thought was the totality of our identity now becomes only a partial identity as a new self emerges that provides a context for our previous self. Our inner being is being strengthened.

When that happens our identity begins to shift. A metaphorical crucifixion occurs as we move through each stage. We “die with Christ” as we exit one stage, in order to be raised with Christ to a new stage of consciousness. There we discover that there are new heights and depths, and new breadth and lengths to this love of Christ – it never ends.

When we do this as Christians, it is a growth in love; it is not growth not for the sake of growth, it is not growth in order to gain power over others or get ahead, but rather growth for the sake of love – so that we may be more compassionate servants of all creation. This conscious participation in our own growth becomes, in a sense, a moral obligation, because this is the way that God strengthens our inner being to make available more of God’s loving presence in human form. Have you ever considered that cultivating your inner power is a moral obligation?

The Fullness of God

The horizontal dimension of the cross can be imagined to be what the author of the letter is speaking about when he prays that they will be filled with the “fullness of God”. We don’t just grow *up* in Christ; we fill *out*. At each stage of development, we have the opportunity to fill out various lines of development – body, mind, and

spirit – to name but three, but we could certainly add more, including moral. At each stage we “fill out” by consciously engaging in practices that help us to grow in these lines of intelligence. This filling out at each stage is growing in the fullness of God.

What I am describing goes right to the heart of our Core Purpose at CMUC – to practice and teach an evolutionary Christian spirituality. This vertical ascent up the cross and this horizontal filling out across lines of intelligence is evolutionary spirituality. It is our contention that Christ consciousness – the same mind and heart that animated Jesus of Nazareth is animating this evolutionary process. What this means is that as we engage in our own evolutionary process consciously, we are actually becoming more intimately acquainted with the heart and mind of Christ.

What’s more, we claim that even this yearning to ascend and to know the fullness of God is intrinsic to our nature – it is the image of God within us. When Bruce Cockburn writes, “Voice of the nova, smile of the dew; all of our yearning, only comes home to you”, he is talking about this innate yearning to fly to God’s heart. You don’t need to look around for this yearning – we’re born with it; it comes as standard equipment.

The Image of God and the Allurement of Christ

In evolutionary Christian spirituality we also make the claim that this yearning is finely tuned to hear

Christ's call – not simply a call from 2000 years ago (it can be activated by reading the gospels, for sure). Rather, we experience it as a call from the Christ of the unrehearsed future – a future existing of all the latent potential within us waiting to be realized in and for Christ. This we experience as allurements, our next best step forward – an awakening to all the latent potential within – what the author of Ephesians calls “the power at work within us” (3:20). When the image of God within us makes a connection with the alluring power of Christ's call from the future, consisting of all our latent potential, we are awakened to an incredible power – the very power of God. The writer puts it this way:

...this power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine (3:20).

This is a remarkable claim, is it not? We have access to a power that is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine. It blows the lid off all the limitations we impose upon ourselves, and blasts away the roadblocks that circumstance places in our path. You see, I wonder what a community of faith could accomplish if we were all tapping into that power at work within us. You know that I believe that the power that created the universe, and the power that is still creating the universe is at work within us. You probably know that I am persuaded that we are occasions of that evolutionary power, and that power is waiting to be truly

unleashed in you in a unique way. Christ is at work as the animating push to evolve – we experience it as yearning, and Christ is present as the compelling draw to realize our fullness – we experience it as allurements.

I regard “church” – the faith community, our being together, our teaching, our purpose and values and vision – to be a sacred container wherein this inner power germinates, sprouts, and flowers. It's the body of Christ, the external expression of all this inner power that is able to accomplish abundantly more than we can imagine. What a privilege to be able to discover, each one of us, what is the height and depth, and breadth and length of this power. Soon our Spiritual Pathways brochure will be available. It's filled with opportunities to develop this inner power. This is an invitation to make space and time to grow in Christ.