

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers
Sunday, November 2, 2025

To prepare our hearts and minds to hear God's word read and proclaimed this day, I'm going to invite you to get comfy in your pews and to close your eyes, if that's your prayer posture, and to take a deep breath in with me

and to breathe it out slowly.

Another deep breath in

and breathe it out slowly

and breathe in God's mercies

and breathe out God's mercies to others

and breathe in God's mercies

and breathe out God's mercies to others.

Gracious Spirit, you are as close as our very next breath. So dwell within us and around us in this time. May your presence quiet within us any voice but your own that we might hear your word for us this day and that in hearing we might be called to lead lives of response. So may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Our scripture lesson is actually the lectionary epistle from yesterday, which was indeed All Saints Day. We celebrate it on a Sunday festival day, the closest Sunday festival day to the actual day itself. So All Saints was yesterday, and the epistle lesson was from Ephesians. So we are going to read together from Ephesians, chapter 1: 15- 23. You can follow along in your pew Bible or you can simply listen to God's word. This is Paul speaking to the church in Ephesus.

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and your love toward all the saints. And for this reason, I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him. So that with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you. What are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints? And what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe according to the work of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised

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him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head of all things for the church which is Christ's body. The fullness of him who fills all in all.

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord endures forever. Amen.

It is something to know that you are being prayed for. It's something to know that you are being prayed for. Each, almost every week in this worship service, we, either before the prayers of God's people or during the prayers of God's people, we read off a list. That list is broken up into usually at least three sections. We pray for those within the Idlewild family, those who are officially members of this place who are in need of prayer. It might be a joy or a concern. We pray for those in the ex..., what we call the extended Idlewild family. Those are people that you the church know to be in need of prayer. And we pray for an outreach ministry of our church as well. Just last week we prayed for our partnership with Living Waters for the World as we sent off a group from Idlewild to serve in Ghana. On some special Sundays, like last Sunday, we announce a birth. There's a rose here on the communion table, and we pray for prayers of gratitude for the gift of new life in our midst. If you've ever spent time on one of those prayer lists and one of those dimensions there, either in the extended family or the Idlewild family, it's a strong possibility that someone caught you on the way in or out of worship and asked how you were doing or told you they had been praying for you. It's a strong possibility that you received a card from our community prayer ministry. Okay. People reach out to you when you're on the prayer list, and they send you notes because they want you to know that you are being lifted in their daily prayers. There is, we believe, power in knowing that we are being brought before our creator by those who love us, right? Especially in times when we don't feel quite as strong and we need to rely ever more on the living presence of our God in our life. Sometimes we realize we don't have words to pray, and in that instance it's a special gift when someone that we call neighbor or church member prays for us. Paul knew the power of knowing that someone was praying for you. It's one of the reasons why he writes the letter to the church in Ephesus. This is the first of a couple of prayers that Paul will speak aloud or write to the people in the epistle. Okay, the church in Ephesus. He wants them to know that they are on his mind and in his daily practice of prayer. He is thinking about them, and he is over and over and over again entrusting them to the care of the living God. But Paul doesn't just know the power of the general notion that you are being prayed for. He wants the people in the church in Ephesus to have particular understanding of what his prayers are. He wants to get specific, and he does here in the very first chapter. First, he tells them that since his visit, he hears about them a lot. That must have made him feel good to know that this reputation of this community of Christ followers was making its

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way all the way to where Paul was in Rome. He would hear about, specifically their faith in Jesus Christ and how they were living out that faith in their town. Okay? And he says because he's heard these wonderful things about how they are living out their faith in Jesus Christ, that is why he gives thanks every time he thinks about them. He gives thanks to the living God for their presence. Right? But then he goes a step further. He starts to talk about what his hope is in his prayers for them. He says that when he is praying for them, he prays that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give them or give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know Christ. So that with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which Christ has called you. What are the riches of Christ's glorious inheritance among the saints? And what is the immeasurable greatness of Christ's power for us who believe? He wants the people in Ephesus, the church, to understand and appreciate the hope that they have in Christ Jesus. He wants them to appreciate the glorious inheritance that they will one day receive as they join the saints. And he wants them to know that there is power in this Christ living within them and at work in the world right now. Right now in their lives. This is an encouraging prayer from Paul. He wants them to hold tightly to hope. He wants them, right now in this moment, he wants them to think about the glorious inheritance they will get at some point in the future. And he wants them to know that Christ has power in the world within their lives and in their community. This is really important, this last thing that he hopes for, that they will appreciate the power of Christ at work. This is important because of the powers and principalities that surround the church in Ephesus. Ephesus is now in what we'd understand as western Turkey, right? And it was a part of the Roman Empire that had spread all across this region with its power and its authority. It had lived, Ephesus had, independently as a city-state for a long time, right? But many years before this letter was written, it had been taken over by the power of the empire. And the Ephesians had been living under this power and authority for quite a while. And so Paul wanted to remind them and wanted them to remind themselves over and over and over again that 'while there are powers and principalities that surround you, even right now, there is a greater power granted by God in Christ Jesus. In fact, all authority in heaven and on earth has been placed under Christ's foot even as he sits at the right hand of God. Right? You need to understand that even as other powers and principalities vie to claim superiority, the truest and most lasting power in the world is that of the living God. I...I told y'all about him when I was with you. I preached his good news to you. You are living out the faith right now, but you are also living amongst other powers and principalities that are going to tell you they are superior.

This Christ has been raised, but those powers and principalities, they show up in uniform every day in your life.

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You need to know that there is a greater power at work in this world. That the power of the empire is not the final power in this world.' It's interesting that Paul wanted to emphasize this to them because of where he was when he wrote this note. Paul was writing from Rome where he is captive of the empire. He is in a Roman prison when he writes this letter. So his daily life is structured by the powers of the world, the Roman imperial powers. When he eats a meal, when he moves outside of his cell to walk around or spend some time in community, all of it is clouded by the power of the empire.

Paul knows something about what it means to sustain faith when surrounded by the powers and principalities of the world. What it takes to do that is continual prayer and continual reliance on the power of Christ at work in your life, in his life. He's not just praying for the church in Ephesus. Paul's going to prayer every single morning, every single afternoon, every single evening. He knows that the only way to not give in to the powers of the world is to continue to uphold or lift up the power of Christ at work within him. The only way to sustain hope, the only way to think about a hopeful future of inheritance is to center Christ over and over and over again in his life. And he wants the people in Ephesus to do the same. He's heard they're faithful, but he wants them to be hopeful. He wants them to recognize the inheritance. He wants them to remember the power of Christ at work within them. because they are a people that are surrounded in their city by powers and principalities that would claim to have ultimate authority.

It's an interesting time to be a Memphian. It's an interesting time to move through our city. It's an interesting time when other powers and principalities come to this place. I wonder what Paul's letter would look like to the church in Memphis. I wonder the ways in which Paul would put before us, first of all, that he's praying for us. That he's praying for us to be the church of Jesus Christ here and now. and that he's praying for us ever more because he knows that when other powers and principalities surround, it can...can sometimes distract us from the one that has final authority in the world. It can sometimes make us less hopeful, sometimes make us forget the glorious inheritance of our God. I wonder if we might hear this morning Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus as Paul's prayer for us, his hope for them as his hope for us. When he talks about the hope of Jesus Christ, when he talks about the glorious inheritance that we know in Christ, what he is saying, when he talks about the power that is at work, what he is saying is that the things that you have seen in Christ Jesus have ultimate power and authority in this world. And the things you have seen are our grace, our love, our forgiveness, they're unity. They are forbearance. They are correction when necessary. But boy, ultimately they are rooted and grounded in a sacrificial love.

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I wonder if we are being called to hold those ideals with us as we move out into the world, in this particular time right now, as the church, to hold up grace and welcome and forgiveness and love. Hold them up as a mirror to other powers that surround us.

Paul wants the church in Ephesus to continue in its faithfulness over and against all that surrounds it. My true belief is that Paul and Christ desire the same for us in this time. That's going to look different for each of us, but each of us has a role. This is All Saints Day. So, I brought a little memento this morning, actually two. one of a picture of my sister and me from the day I was ordained as a pastor and another from when I was about...I wasn't quite one year old. I'm wearing this really cool '80s feathery vest that I did not pick out. And I'm being held by my mom Jean Bedez Powers on one hip and my dad Richard Joseph Powers. He's on the other side of me. Long ago that picture kind of wore out, but I brought it with me this morning anyway because I wanted to put it up. When I was looking at it yesterday, I thought about the ways in which my mother modeled for me what claiming the power of Christ looked like in the world. I remember the time that we traveled to Washington DC to see the AIDS quilt laid out for the first time in its totality. We got to walk and see the patch that my mother had created for my uncle Mark who died in the mid 80s. And we didn't stop there. We looked at the quilt, we went back to our hotel, we changed clothes, and then we gathered with several thousand people as we walked through DC in mid November with candles lit in vigil for those who were excluded, those who were feared, those who were outcast, right? And we sang songs together as we walked through those streets. I was about 10 years old. We sang songs. We stopped in front of the White House. We prayed aloud. Some yelled, some whispered. Then we kept moving. I thought about that this morning because it was our way by candle light of holding up a different sort of power in the world to that which seems prevading. I thought about this morning, and it struck me that whether protest or prayer, the calling of Paul through Christ is to lift up that power of Christ in the world right now. I don't know if you're a protester or you're a prayer. If you're neither, you, well, you need to pick something, because the church is called to witness in this time. It's called to be the sort of epistle to a community that needs to grow in wisdom, that needs to grow in its revelatory understanding of God at work, that needs to hold hope tightly, that needs to look with hope towards the future of glorious inheritance, that needs to believe and trust that all power, all authority in heaven and on earth have been placed within Christ. And that power looks like grace, and it looks like love, and it looks like peace, and it looks like welcome.

My hope and my prayer is that when the story of Idlewild reaches the ear of Paul, he might give thanks to God for the faithfulness he hears about that grows from this place.

Let's pray together.

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Gracious God, powers surround us in every way. And yet you are the final authority. And your power makes itself known in vulnerability. Your power makes itself known in love. Your power makes itself known in sacrifice. Your power makes itself known in welcome. And we are indeed to be your body now. We don't exactly know how to do that. Some of us are prayers. Some of us are protesters. Some of us have a place somewhere in between, but all of us know that we are being called to lift up your strength and your power. So may we do it faithfully in the particular ways you're calling us to do right now. May we trust and may we believe that your power is above any power and principality of the world. May we trust and may we believe that that power still...still can transform hearts and minds and communities. For we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen one. Amen.