

## WE ARE ALMOST THERE!

*After all our struggles, our final goal is knowing we do bounce back from every trouble because God is at home in us and our final outcome is never in doubt.*

### Ephesians 3.14-21

14For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. 16I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may **be strengthened in your inner being** with power through his Spirit, 17and that **Christ may dwell in your hearts** through faith, as **you are being rooted and grounded in love**. 18I pray **that you may have the power to comprehend**, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, 21to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

I have put nearly 3,000 miles on my car since I was last in the pulpit which leads to a secret I can share – I don't like to drive! Each night before I have a long drive, I do not sleep well. I know I have to do it so I follow through and eagerly anticipate those landmarks that say I'm nearly there! In Michigan its the wooded interstate on the Indiana border. In New York its the falling rock zones bordering the Mohawk River. They are comforting sights.

Being a Christian has also been likened to going on a journey – a pilgrimage. A Christian classic was written by John Bunyan back in 1628 in the early days of the Protestant Reformation. It is an allegory so the main character is a man named Christian who represents every Christian believer. He travels from his hometown, The City of Destruction, to the Celestial City – a symbolic journey from the present life to eternal life! You can still read this classic (ask Sharon at the local library) which was once 2<sup>nd</sup> in sales only to the Bible!

We ARE on a journey as men and women of faith...and for most of us, I can honestly say, WE ARE ALMOST THERE! How can you tell? Well there are comforting sights and experiences in our walk with the Lord that tell us we are making progress. The Apostle Paul outlines these things for us in our lesson this morning. The Scriptures tell us what to look for but this morning I can tell you how, as your pastor, I've seen these things in you. So I want to encourage you who have been through the fire...I want to comfort you who have experienced more than you thought you could bear and I want to urge you to keep on keeping on because although we're close to our destination – to paraphrase A Field of Dreams – this is not heaven, it's Iowa - just a hop skip and jump from Christian's "Celestial City."

Paul's first hint that we are drawing near to God is seeing that we are being **strengthened in your inner being**. Honestly this is one of the greatest experiences of a pastor. I have talked with you and walked with you when you have lost a love in your life – through the death of a spouse, or a nasty

divorce, or the pain of watching your kids struggle...or the most horrible experience of losing a child. I've held your hand when you told me you wanted to die yourself...when you've sat with me and wept because you didn't know if you would be farming next year. I've even experienced your anger when I didn't do what you thought I should do. My kids have told me that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. Paul prayed that you would be **strengthened in your inner being**. I am a witness to that strength at home in your lives. Christian friend, **WE ARE ALMOST THERE!**

Last Sunday morning as I drove, I listened to CBS Sunday Morning where it was reported that for the 1<sup>st</sup> time in America's history less than 50% of our population claim a church home. Part of this is the after effects of COVID but one of my mom's neighbors confessed that staying home in her pajamas with a cup of coffee and church on the radio was so much easier than getting out, risking being in a crowd and going to church. Yet church has long been the place and experience where believers are encouraged, urged forward and where they encounter Christ. Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> sign that we are moving forward is that **Christ may dwell in your hearts**. Staying home may become easier when this church begins seeking for a pastor, when the occupant of the pulpit changes each week. In fact with so many churches in our area being without pastors or having long-distance clergy – attendance will go down. **Christ wants to dwell in our hearts** and that happens when we come together because the Lord may be found in a sermon or a hymn or the prayers but I guarantee you that the inevitable place where people find Jesus is in other people. Elsewhere Paul has urged that we not neglect the fellowship of believers. Church is the easiest way to encounter the Living Lord. And this church is an excellent place to do that. Christian friend, **WE ARE ALMOST THERE!**

All this is true and I hope that it does encourage and comfort. It will do that if you and I know it, understand it and can depend upon it. Our faith assures us that "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." This is basic Christianity – nothing new. Yet Paul continues in Romans asking: *"But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard?"* People like us need to understand. Reformed ministers must learn Greek – the language of the New Testament in seminary. Yet if I preached to you in Koine Greek it would literally be Greek to you. Paul knew that understanding is the key. One of the greatest compliments I've received as your pastor has come from someone who listens each week but is not a member here. He has told me, "I can understand what you are talking about, Pastor Bill." That is important because Paul tells us one of the assurances that we're doing God work is **that you may have the power to comprehend**. I hope that is what you'll always hear from this pulpit – messages that mean something practical, understandable and truly biblical. Because if we hear those, then you can be assured that **WE ARE ALMOST THERE!** That is where Jesus wants all of us to be!