

**Archbishop Thabo Makgoba**  
**Fikelela Candlelight Service**  
**Zonnebloem – 15 May 2008**

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**Ephesians 1:15-23 (Contemporary English Version)**

May I speak in the name of the One God, Creator, Redeemer, and Spirit of Life.

Thank you for your invitation to be with you today.

I chose this passage from the Bible, because it has lovely things to say about God and his love for us, and about his Spirit – God’s gift to us which we celebrated last Sunday, the feast of Pentecost.

St Paul is writing to the Church in Ephesians – but Bible scholars suspect that this was a circular letter written to Christians everywhere, and we just happen to have preserved the copy that went to Ephesus!

This means that what we read here is a message for all Christians. And the first thing we read is that people matter.

St Paul says, I have heard about you – I know you love Jesus, and you love those who also love Jesus – and I never stop being grateful to God for you.

He doesn’t ask anything else about them – he says: you believe in Jesus, so you belong: you belong to him, and you belong to his church. He does not set any conditions.

I am sure there are times when you really need to hear this – sadly, sometimes our churches don’t make you feel very welcome. But St Paul says – you are welcome, you are part of God’s people.

Then St Paul prays for God’s people – that God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, will give them the Spirit to make them wise, so that they understand what it means to know God.

Knowing God means, first of all, knowing that he is the God who is love, and then knowing that he loves you.

Each one of you is his precious and beloved child, unique and special, and he thinks you are wonderful. He made you so he could love you, and so you could know his love, through the whole of your life. Because, as St Paul said in his letter to the Romans, nothing can separate us from the love of God.

This is what St Paul meant when he said in today's reading:

My prayer is that light will flood your hearts and that you will understand the hope that was given to you when God chose you.

He chose you – he chose you for himself, and he wants the light of his love to flood your hearts – to fill them so they overflow with love.

Then, he says,

you will discover the glorious blessings that will be yours together with all God's people.

God wants to bless us, and go on blessing us all through our lives.

Now, what does he mean by that?

Well, let us be real here, and also say what he does not mean.

- He does not mean that all our problems will go away.
- He does not guarantee that life will be easy.
- He does not promise to give us anything we ask.

But he does promise us this:

- He promises that his love will stay with us, no matter what we face.
- He promises to be an encouragement to us, when we are down.
- He promises to give us strength to face each day.

And he promises to push us in the right direction, even when we don't feel like it!

Because, God not only wants to bless us, he wants to make us a blessing to others.

Every Christian can be a blessing to others. That is not just something for clergy!

This is what we mean when we talk about Christians together making up the body of Christ. Like different parts of a body, we all have our own role to play – and the body works best when every bit cooperates with all the rest!

God's blessings are for all God's people, and it is up to each of us to share them with one another.

How can we do this? Here are a few examples: (*ad lib*: ARVs, nutrition reminders, and sharing ...)

Sometimes it means telling other people how God loves you, and how God helps you – and telling others that they can know God's love and help too.

Sometimes it means helping them in practical ways – showing them God’s love in your actions.

This means behaving like Jesus – being honest with others, and responsible, especially when it comes to status and relationships. Everyone must do what they can to avoid the spread of infection.

Now, if you think all this is a big ask, do not worry. The second part of St Paul’s prayer has the answer. He says this:

I want you to know about the great and mighty power that God has for us followers. It is the same power he used when he raised Christ from death.

When God asks us to do something, through the Holy Spirit, he gives us the power, or whatever else we need, to do it. He is not going to ask us to do something impossible!

He promises that his power will be at work within us, helping us to live as he wants us to live; helping us to do what he wants us to do. So have confidence!

Finally, St Paul tells us this

Christ rules over all forces, authorities, powers and rulers. He rules over all beings in this world, and he will rule in the future world as well.

This is our reassurance when we are faced with the reality of human mortality.

It is the promise that God’s love triumphs over the power of death – whether our death or the death of someone we love.

The same power that raised Christ from the dead will carry us through, on that mysterious journey, so we come safely to the place where Jesus rules, for God has put all things under the power of Christ.

So, let me sum up:

- God loves us, and wants us to know how much he loves us
- God wants to bless us
- God wants to make us a blessing to others
- God promises his power, to help us live as he wants us to live
- And at the end of our lives, God will bring us safely to our heavenly home.

Finally, let me ask you to do something to help share this marvellous love of God.

I would like you each to take a candle with you when you leave, and then give it to someone who was not here today – give it to someone who needs to know the light of God’s love in their lives.

And tell them your prayer is that the light of God’s love may flood their hearts too.

So, may God bless you – and make you a blessing to others. Amen