

All Saints Talk for Sunday 12 January 2025

'Together we Stand' Sermon series

'You are Empowered' Naomi Pendle.

Ephesians 1:15-23. Paul's prayer for the church.

We are continuing today in the book of Ephesians, and we're following on from what Tom reminded us last week in the Book of Ephesians with that long kind of WoW expression of Paul's praise, a 200 word sentence, or just over 200 word sentence in the original Greek, and it's just full of praise for God. But Tom reminded us that we are chosen. We are not here by accident. We are here for a reason. But today we move on to the second half of the of Ephesians. One to think about. How we know we are empowered? How you know you are empowered? Paul wants to say more. He doesn't want to just praise God. He wants to turn to us and think about what we are as a church. He turned to the Ephesians and wanted to talk to them about what they were as a church. And as I was praying, I was reminded of a garden. There's lots of thanks in this passage in Ephesians, and it reminded me of us, of just how beautiful we are. If I look around at you, if you look around at each other, how God has done so much in your lives, but also how there is more of a garden to make. We're not finished yet. There is more to cultivate, there is more to sow, there is more to grow, and that comes through the empowerment from God. And that's really what this is about. It's about Paul saying to the Ephesians and God saying to us, look at you. You are amazing, your faith and your love, but I want to show you more, and I want to empower you more, and I want to do more through you and in you. And that seems a great way to start 2025.

So first of all, I'll talk about knowing. Paul opens this part of Ephesians by praying. This is really a prayer, the whole of this passage. And he says, 'ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people everywhere, I have not stopped thanking God for you' and I think that's a call for us today as well, to look around, look at the person sitting next to you, think about the person sitting behind you, we should be thanking God for them. Look at the church, how it is growing, how it's alive, all that has happened through the Rock project, but also all that's happening through his community here, and we should be thanking God for each other. So I asked my home group about who they would thank God for, what they would thank God for. Churchwardens, the PCC safeguarding officers, was one of the top highlights on the list, because they do tough work, maintenance, the Vicar's

wife, the vicar too, the Rock project, the children and all the children's work, the small saints toddler group, which seems to be flourishing, the flowers, the musicians, and this is just to name a few. There are so many more caterers, people who work at the hub. There's also all the work we do beyond our church bounds, even beyond Western work. In Malawi, the Carol service is called to give money to Sudan to help the famine there, and we raised an amazing amount of money. And I'm also thankful for people here who have walked with God for years and decades, that have walked through the tough times as well as the easy times, that we are a wise church, that we have done it, and we have been there, and we carry that wisdom and that faith that has kept us going, the deep friendships, the people who listen to God, the people who pray, even when it's tough to pray, and also the new people here that have been had the courage to walk through the door in recent months or weeks, and that's not an easy thing to do, so we have much To be thankful for, but God is far from finished.

In verse 18, Paul goes on to say, I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can know the confident hope he has given. The church in Ephesus was full of many things to thank God for. But it was not yet finished. The church in Ephesus had been planted. Paul had visited and spent a couple of years with the church. Then he'd moved on, and then he was in prison, and he was writing this letter from prison. We know from Revelations that the Church will keep growing, the church in Ephesus, but that it will still not be perfect. The criticism of the church in Ephesus in Revelation is that it forgets its first love, that Ephesus comes to know God, but it forgets its first love. We all have ways to still keep growing as a church and as individuals, but here, Paul is saying that that will come through us knowing God better. He wants to pray that our hearts will be flooded with light. So when I read this passage, I thought of the David Webb telescope. I don't know if any of you are into telescopes. It fascinates me. So this was launched in 2021 it is seen as the most advanced telescope that we have as a human creation. It's made of gold, so you have 18 hexagons of gold that are there as the mirror. It's about three times bigger than the mirror on the Hubble telescope, so it allows us to see much, much more. I guess one interesting thing for me is that it doesn't change the stars in the sky. The stars in the sky are just the same as they were before, but now we can see them. And I think, in a way, that's what Paul is saying here as well. God is the same, but he wants us to know him more. He wants to flood our hearts with light so we can see God more and more. The way that the David Webb telescope works is to expand the kind of light we see through the telescope so it expands our vision beyond the visible spectrum of light into the infrared

spectrum. It's clever. It does this through a mirror and through blocking out the heat of the sun, but what it allows us to see is to be flooded with a new kind of light that allows us to see space in a new way. And the David Webb Telescope has allowed scientists to see things they never even dreamed of. They are busy, three years in trying to work out what all this means and what we are seeing: new galaxies, new kind of beauty in the universe that people hadn't thought of before. But it's come through a new flooding of light, and that is what Paul asks of us as well that we would be flooded with a new light, not just that we would understand God's creation better, but that so we would see him better, so that we would know God better. I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light, so that you can know the hope he has given you. And how do we know this hope we can look at God's creation. The Bible makes it very clear that looking at God's creation can help us know God. So the David Webb telescope is part of that, and science has its history in thinking about wonder and awe of God.

But there are other things too. There's reading the Bible, there's thinking about it, spending time in it. There's praying, there's spending time with friends like home group, there's walking with God, but there's also the Holy Spirit that must move within us. In this passage, Paul is talking about knowing God through both Scripture, but also through the Spirit. And that, I think, is one of my big calls for you today, that we should be praying for each other, that the Holy Spirit would let us know God more, that the Holy Spirit would flood our hearts with light. So we do often pray for each other. We have dilemmas, we have moments when we need God's help, and we ask our friends to pray for us. Maybe we have a problem at work. We have a health issue. We're not feeling so great. Maybe our children are struggling with something. And we ask our friends to help us send a flare to God to say, Look, this is an emergency. God, please help us. But in this passage in Ephesians, Paul says, I pray for you constantly, and he's praying that their hearts will be flooded with light so they know God more. And I would challenge us to ask each other to pray for us that we would know God more, that we would share our journeys with each other that we would say where we're at with God. How is our walk with Jesus going? Where has it been tough? Where do we want to know God more? What is he doing in our lives at the moment? So that we, like Paul was praying for the church in Ephesus, we can pray for each other to really kind of forward our own journeys.

But what does God want to show our hearts if he's flooding it with light? When the David Webb telescope came up, scientists were flooded with all these new images, and they're busy trying to process them. They don't really know what they mean yet. So what does God want to show us. Show us if he's flooding our hearts with light again.

A key thing in this passage, Paul emphasizes that he wants to show us that you we are empowered, that you are empowered. I also pray that you will understand the. Incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe in Him. At the heart of this prayer that Paul is praying over the church in Ephesus is one of empowerment, and the church in Ephesus was full of an awareness of what power meant. They were in a powerful city. Paul goes to the powerful cities of that time, and Ephesus was an incredibly powerful city. It had been important to the Greeks, to the Persians, to the Spartans, and now to the Romans. For the Romans at this time, at the time that Paul was walking the earth and Jesus was walking the earth before him, Ephesus was the gateway to Asia. It was the gateway to the east. It was a center for trade. It had the ports, and it had important roads into the interior. And there was a massive amount of money that Ephesus made, but also that passed through Ephesus. It was powerful because of that. It had a strange history though. Ephesus had never been fully conquered by the Romans. The Romans were powerful and were a threat to Ephesus, but actually Ephesus became Roman because it was left in the legacy of a will. It was through a will on someone's death, on the king's death, that Ephesus passes to the Roman Empire. And therefore you have this uncertainty of power. You have a proud people of Ephesus who weren't fully conquered by the Romans, who believe and have a commitment to Artemis, the goddess of hunting. And you see the temple there, the temple that was there before the Romans and during the Romans. And often power at this time was wrapped up in the divine so you have this strong image of a pre Roman God, of a Greek god in the city of this amazing temple. So the width of this temple was about the length of Bath Abbey. So it would have been phenomenal. It would be phenomenal now, but even then, it would be more phenomenal. So you have these signs of power throughout the city, not just of money, but of divinity. And then you also have the Romans that people clearly feared, and that was very clear in the time of Paul as well, when he was there, that Roman rule and the fear of Roman suppression was very much in people's minds. In Acts 19, when Paul is there and there's a riot, and it's calmed partly because of the fear of breaking the Roman Peace. And just to say, today, we also have these conflicting powers. I don't know where you think power sits in the world today, in human in a kind of human, secular sense.

We have very different figures of power, and these are kind of some examples of some people who you might think have power, or objects that you might think have power. I've put up there an Intel processor and a kind of image of the internet. Maybe that power no longer sits in one person. It sits in the internet or this kind of global connection, but it feels uncertain. It feels unknown, but into that uncertainty in Ephesus, and into kind of our uncertainty of where power sits in the world today, Paul is very clear that actually power sits with God. It sits with our God, and it's shown because of the resurrection. In verse 20 of this passage, Paul says he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at the right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion. There is no question for Paul, where power sits. It is with God. He is seated above all authority. But how does he know this? How can we be certain when there's all these other claims to power. And it's very clear for Paul that we can be certain because of the resurrection.

Paul, again and again, comes back to the resurrection as his reason for confidence in faith. In one Corinthians 15, he recalls his experience in Ephesus when he was there himself. And he recalls the riots. He talks about beasts. It probably refers to the riots he faced and the opposition he faced. And he's talking to the Corinthians then about why he had confidence to keep going in Ephesus. And he said, If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, because tomorrow we die. For Paul, it was crucial in his mission in Ephesus, and he reminds the Ephesians, again in this letter, that our power and our confidence is certain because of the resurrection. We shouldn't eat and drink because tomorrow we die, because we do not die. We can have confidence in the power that we will be raised to life again, because Jesus was raised to life again.

Death is a scary thing. I don't think we've lost that even amongst us as people of God, who know that death has lost its sting. Death still feels like a very frightening thing, and I think that's because we have eternity written in our heart. God made us in His image, we are part of an eternal kingdom. And so our very being as children of God is to know eternity and to expect it. But on Earth, we don't always see that, but in the resurrection, we see it. And Paul is very clear that is it: that makes all the difference. We know that Jesus was raised from the dead.

Very briefly. It should make all the difference. When I was thinking about how power makes all the difference, I was reminded of the massive shift in power recently in Syria. We had the fall of the Assad regime and the rise of a new regime under al Sharma. People were freed from prison.

People out in the streets. They were celebrating. But to be honest, in Syria at the moment, there is massive uncertainty. Will this leader bring a good change? Will life be better? Will it just be as authoritarian and dangerous to live in Syria as it was before? That uncertainty was there in Ephesus, and we have that uncertainty in all parts of the world today. But Paul would say, No, you have a certain hope. Jesus was raised from the dead, and the kingdom he calls you to is certain, and it's a different kingdom. It's a kingdom first and foremost, built on his sacrifice, because the resurrection was only possible because first he faced the cross. Because, although he made the earth and He made the stars and he made the galaxies that the David web can see in the distance, although he was there at the beginning of time. As Tom's passage last week, spoke about, although we were chosen from the Beginning of Time as those galaxies were made. He still was willing to die for us because He loved us, and that has the power to save us, because he was finally raised from the dead.

So to end, I'm going to pray a prayer, and I would love you to join in. So this is a prayer for us. It's based on the passage in Ephesians, but I have summarised it, and I have changed it so that it's about us and not about Ephesus. So I will read it, but if you join in, that would be great.

'God, thank You that You have filled All Saints with people who have a strong faith in Jesus and who love God's people. Give us spiritual wisdom and insight so that we can grow in our knowledge of God. Flood our hearts with light so that we can understand the confident hope he has given us, who He called. We are His holy people and his rich and glorious inheritance. We also pray that we will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe in Him, Amen.