

“Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so, little ones to Him belong, they are weak, but He is strong. Yes, Jesus love me. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me, the Bible tells me so.” (William Bradbury, “Jesus Loves Me”).

Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians; my prayer for you is that we will be so empowered by the love of Christ that we will be able to turn crises into opportunities and embrace the possibilities that God has for us; possibilities that often appear in the form of obstacles to overcome.

The Church is a powerful force in this world, and we face obstacles. The Presbyterian Church USA is powerful force in our nation, and we face obstacles. Pennside Presbyterian Church is a powerful force in our community, and we face obstacles; we do not have the power of wealth and position; we cannot compel people to do our bidding; but we can love. We can love one another. We can love our neighbor. We can love the outcast and the stranger; we can love the ones it is popular to hate. We can love with the love of Christ and with the power of the love of Christ, anything is possible!

Rooted and grounded in the love of Christ, we can see beyond our circumstances to the God who is at work in the midst of these same circumstances; we can name them for what they are, sing, “Jesus loves me,” and praise the Lord: *Ephesians 3:20–21 (NRSV)* ²⁰ *Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine,* ²¹ *to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (So be it).*

Pennside Presbyterian Church: Tough times don’t last. Tough people do. We can do this.

1. Tough times don’t last. Tough people do. (The Power to Persevere)

Gregory Peck (who played Atticus Finch in the movie “To Kill a Mockingbird”) coined the phrase, “Tough times don’t last. Tough people do.”

Tough people form and are formed by tough churches. Tough churches aren’t hard hearted; quite the reverse. Tough churches are free to be tender hearted because we have the resilience to not get swept up in the heat of the moment. We’re not brittle which allows us to be better.

Resilience allows us to bend and not break. Resilience empowers us to resist the temptation to join in the anxiety and fear that so permeate our culture. The more things change, the more opportunities anxiety and fear have to derail us and the more opportunities we have to develop greater and greater resilience and capacity to weather the next storm.

Tough people form and are formed by tough churches, so how do we do that? How do we build our capacity to be resilient?

Paul points us to the core competency that builds our resilience so that we are a tough church formed of tough people who can outlast tough times: *Ephesians 3:16–17 (NRSV)* ¹⁶ *I 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,¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

Back in the spring, a friend gave us some cuttings of a plant. The roots were exposed and they advised us to plant them that night, but we didn't; they weren't rooted and grounded and they didn't make it. So we went to Glicks Nursery, got some other plants that were rooted and grounded, planted them properly, watered them thoroughly, gave thanks for the abundant rains, and we know have some thriving gardens.

You and I are like those plants; Pennside is the garden. If we continue to grow in our faith, our roots will sink deep into the fertile soil of the love of Christ. We will grow deep and wide. We will develop and continue to expand our resilience; we will be a tough church formed of tough people who can overcome tough times.

Dig deep. Read God's word and listen for what the Spirit will say to you. Dig deep. Follow Paul's example and pray. When cares and concerns come your way, don't let them weigh you down; offer them to God in prayer and He will lift you up. With God's help, you will bend and not break; you will be resilient and rise above the anxiety and fear; "rooted and grounded in love" tough times don't last. Tough people do, and tough churches too!

2. We can do this

We can do this.

Let's take a trip to the beach. Smell the sea air, see the gulls battle for a scrap of food, and look out at the ocean. Wave after wave meets the shore and still there are more. We look to the right, and there's more to be seen. We look to the left, and there's more to be seen. We look to the horizon, and we know that the line where the sea meets the sky is merely an illustration of our limits to comprehend and know. There's more to see, and that more offers us a glimpse of the transcendence of God as the waves keep rolling in.

Ephesians 3:18–19 (NRSV)¹⁸ I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth,¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

We all have our limits, but the love of Christ surpasses knowledge; the love of Christ has no limits. Any boundary we perceive that somehow limits "Jesus Loves Me This I Know" exists only in us.

We can do this with God's help, and consider this vision of our church: *Ephesians 3:18–19 (NRSV)¹⁸ I pray that [we] may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth,¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that [we] may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

Now make this prayer your prayer: *Ephesians 3:18–19 (NRSV)¹⁸ I pray that [I] may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth,*

¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that [I] may be filled with all the fullness of God.

God answers this prayer.

A classic story told by Corrie Ten Boom shows us what can happen when we ask and God answers:

“It was in a church in Munich that I saw him—a balding, heavysset man in a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his hands. People were filing out of the basement room where I had just spoken, moving along the rows of wooden chairs to the door at the rear. It was 1947 and I had come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives.

“It was the truth they needed most to hear in that bitter, bombed-out land, and I gave them my favorite mental picture. Maybe because the sea is never far from a Hollander’s mind, I liked to think that that’s where forgiven sins were thrown. ‘When we confess our sins,’ I said, ‘God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever. ...’

“The solemn faces stared back at me, not quite daring to believe. There were never questions after a talk in Germany in 1947. People stood up in silence, in silence collected their wraps, in silence left the room.

“And that’s when I saw him, working his way forward against the others. One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat; the next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones. It came back with a rush: the huge room with its harsh overhead lights; the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor; the shame of walking naked past this man. I could see my sister’s frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath the parchment skin. *Betsie, how thin you were!*

[Betsie and I had been arrested for concealing Jews in our home during the Nazi occupation of Holland; this man had been a guard at Ravensbruck concentration camp where we were sent.]

“Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: ‘A fine message, Fräulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!’

“And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course—how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women?

“But I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. I was face-to-face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze.

“‘You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk,’ he was saying, ‘I was a guard there.’ No, he did not remember me.

“ ‘But since that time,’ he went on, ‘I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fräulein,’ again the hand came out— ‘will you forgive me?’

“And I stood there—I whose sins had again and again to be forgiven—and could not forgive. Betsie had died in that place—could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?

“It could not have been many seconds that he stood there—hand held out—but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.

“For I had to do it—I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. ‘If you do not forgive men their trespasses,’ Jesus says, ‘neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.’

“I knew it not only as a commandment of God, but as a daily experience. Since the end of the war I had had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that.

“And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion—I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. ‘... Help!’ I prayed silently. ‘I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.’

“And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

“ ‘I forgive you, brother!’ I cried. ‘With all my heart!’

“For a long moment we grasped each other’s hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God’s love so intensely, as I did then”

(excerpted from “I’m Still Learning to Forgive” by Corrie ten Boom. Reprinted by permission from *Guideposts Magazine*. Copyright © 1972 by Guideposts Associates, Inc., Carmel, New York 10512>).

Let nothing trouble you
Let nothing frighten you
All things are passing
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things
Nothing is wanting

["The Love of Christ"]

July 26, 2015

To the one who has God,
God alone suffices.

Amen.

(St Teresa of Avila)

Tough times don't last. Tough people do. Dig deep. Offer your limits to God; God alone suffices.
We can do this thanks to the limitless love of Christ. Amen.