

5 January 2020

Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-19a

Text: 19: (Peterson) “oh, the utter extravagance of his work in us who trust him—the endless energy, boundless strength!”

Endless Energy -- Boundless Strength!

Introduction: Isn't it wonderful that God gives us so much energy and strength that Paul feels it necessary to write of God's "utter extravagance of his work in us who trust him?" Of course many of us would have a rejoinder to Paul. "What energy, what strength? I can barely make it out of bed some days." But therein lays the miracle. Whatever your spiritual, mental or physical state, God spreads Her limitless bounty on us with extravagance! And our price for this bounty is simply to trust Him and believe.

Why?: We might well ask "Why should God give us energy and strength? To what purpose are we blessed with these gifts? "Our Roman Catholic roots would have us say" We receive these gifts for the propagation of the faith." Well, that certainly sounds serious enough for a kiss of the Bishop's ring. It is also correct. Certainly our energy and strength, at least some portion of it, should go towards the task of bringing the good news to the unchurched. I know, I can hear the unspoken words: "Who me? Evangelize? I don't think so!" The very word "evangelize" brings a chill to our brains and tight lips to the "not me" set of our mouths. At the very best we might say "Can't we hire a priest to do that?" Of course we can – but here is the rub: WE are the priests charged with that responsibility. We are priests without the collar, but still we are evangelists. We may not be like my friend in another church who not only never meets a stranger, but actually has the temerity to ask people about their faith and invites them to church. I suspect he harbors a secret Baptist heritage. May his tribe increase! We all have some gift useful for spreading the good news. For some of us, music is our gift, for others it may be baking or cooking, for still others it is the living example we set. All of us can say: Come friend, sit with me in Church this Sunday. Energy and strength! We certainly need to use it in sharing the Good News.

There is another reason why God has been so generous with his gifts of energy and strength. It is so that we might experience joy. Dancing down the aisles in church may not be part of the prescribed liturgy in the *Book of Common Prayer*, but we should be full of joy, none the less. Whether it is a baptism or a funeral, from Alpha to Omega, we should be full of joy and we should be showing that joy to all who are around us. Bodies may betray us, but the spirit of God never does and the joy of belief is there for all to see and share. Smiling, laughter, joking are more Christian Episcopalian than any dour expression of seriousness and self-denial. Our most serious liturgies should be leavened with joy – else we have camouflaged Christ with gloom. Energy and strength! We immerse ourselves in an ocean of joy.

How?: The "why" of the gifts of energy and strength naturally become the question of "how" do we use these holy gifts? At least a small portion of those gifts we would be wise to direct inward. Let me quickly note that I am not advocating narcissism here – self-centered behavior is not a proper nor moral use of God's gifts. A joyful, belief filled, self examination is what seems to be called for. As Christians we know that we cannot really help others until we have helped ourselves. Note, that I said, helped, not cured. We are imperfect people and shall

remain so. To my psychologist friends I have often said that at my age my defense mechanisms are now my real personality, I am quite happy with them and please leave them alone, if you don't mind. Nor is this the kind of self examination that would be more at home in a church confessional. It is really not necessary to labor over one's sins and shortcomings. That is what we celebrate Easter for – Jesus took on those sins, both real and symbolic, for the whole of the human race. We simply need to do a self check of our life joy level. Am I joyful in my beliefs? Is my joy permeating the rest of my existence? Am I spending too much time on the negatives in my life? Do I need to use more of the gift of energy and strength to build my spiritual self? Nothing profound here, it is just your existence we are talking about.

We really need to use these holy gifts to turn outward – to serve others. If we find ourselves in a leadership position we need to check to make sure that we are truly “servant-leaders.” Are we leading through commands or are we leading by providing service and renewal to those around us? Think what might happen if the endless energy and boundless strength of which Paul speaks found its way into the manner in which we relate to other human beings. God's love might be established as a living reality sooner than we could ever imagine.

When?: We might ask ourselves when do we realize these Godly gifts? The answer is short: Now. The Kingdom of God is here, now, in each of us. It is by our use of the energy and strength of Jesus that the Kingdom of God's love is re-established and renewed in each moment of time.

Paul sums up his lesson for us by saying that it is “with the eyes of your heart enlightened,” that we fully transform ourselves with God's endless energy and boundless strength. Amen.