The text for the sermon this morning is written in the nineteenth verse of the third chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians: "And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge."

At first, those words sound almost contradictory. – How can we know something that passes knowledge?

St. Paul is not telling us that the love of Christ is unknowable. Quite the opposite. – He is praying that we may know it – really know it – trust it – live it – and be strengthened by it. – But at the same time, he reminds us that the love of Christ is greater than anything we can fully measure or explain.

We can know it truly. – We can never exhaust it.

That is a useful thing to remember – because there are times when we confuse faith with understanding. – We imagine that if our faith is strong enough – then we ought to be able to make sense of everything that happens to us. – We ought to understand why one prayer is answered one way – and another prayer another – or another seemingly not at all. We ought to understand why suffering comes, why plans fall apart, why someone we love becomes ill, or why life takes a turn we never expected.

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But St. Paul does not pray that Christians will understand everything. – He prays that we will be "rooted and grounded in love." – And that is something completely different.

A tree does survive the storm because it understands it. – It survives because its roots run deep.

A building remains standing after the storm because it can explain the wind. – It stands because its foundation is firm.

In the same way, our faith is not held together by our ability to explain everything. – It is held together by being rooted and grounded in the love of Christ.

And that brings us to the Gospel. – Where St. Luke tells us that Jesus came to a city called Nain. As He approached the gate, a funeral procession was coming out. A young man had died. He was the only son of his mother. And she was a widow.

St. Luke gives us those details because they matter. – This woman was not only grieving the death of her son. She was also facing a future that had suddenly become far more uncertain. – She had already lost her husband. – Now she had lost her only child.

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And then St. Luke tells us something very simple – "And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her."

Notice what does not happen. – She does not run up to Jesus. – She does not ask Him for a miracle. – She does not make some great statement of faith. – She doesn't even speak.

Christ sees her. – And He has compassion. –That may be one of the most comforting things in the Gospel.

Before she asks – – He sees.

Before she speaks – – He knows.

Before she understands what He is going to do – she is already the object of His compassion. – The widow did not understand what Christ was about to do – but she was already surrounded by His love. – And perhaps that is the bridge between the Gospel and the Epistle.

We often want God first to explain Himself. – Christ gives us something better. – He gives us Himself.

St. Paul prays that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith – that we may be rooted and grounded in love – and that we may know the love of Christ which passes knowledge. – In other words,

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faith does not mean that we always understand what God is doing. – It means that we have come to know enough of Christ's love to trust Him when we do not understand.

Now, that is easier to say when life is calm. – It is much harder when we are standing with the widow at the gate.

There are moments in life when the questions come quickly. Why this? – Why now? – Why him? – Why her? – Why me?

And sometimes there is no answer that satisfies us.

But the Gospel does not give us a distant Christ watching suffering from somewhere far away. – It gives us a Christ who sees. – A Christ who is moved with compassion. – A Christ who walks toward sorrow rather than away from it.

And then Jesus says to the widow – "Weep not."

Now, we should not hear those words as though Jesus were scolding her for grieving. – He is not telling her that sorrow is wrong. – He is about to do something she cannot imagine.

He steps forward, touches the bier, and says – "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise." – And the young man sits up and begins to speak.

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St. Luke then gives us another beautiful detail – "And he delivered him to his mother."

Christ does not simply demonstrate His power. – He restores what had been lost. – His compassion becomes action. – His love does something.

St. Cyril of Alexandria, commenting on this passage, points out that Christ shows both compassion and divine authority here. – He does not pray as one asking someone else to raise the dead. – He speaks with His own authority – and death obeys Him.

That is important. – The love of Christ is not merely sentimental. –It is powerful. –It is the love of the One who is Lord even over death.

And that helps us understand why St. Paul prays the way he does in the Epistle. – He asks that we may be "strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man." – Notice that he does not first ask that every difficulty be removed. – He asks that Christians be strengthened within.

There are times when God changes the situation. – There are other times when He gives us grace to endure the situation. – The widow at Nain received her son back. –Not every grieving

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mother in this life receives that same miracle. –Not every illness is cured. Not every loss is reversed. Not every prayer is answered in the way we would choose.

And if we turn this Gospel into a promise that Christ will always remove every sorrow here and now, we will misunderstand it. – The miracle is a sign. – It shows us who Jesus is. – It shows us the compassion of God. – And it points beyond itself to the greater promise that death will not have the final word.

And that is why the crowd says – "God hath visited his people." – They understand that something more than an unusual event has taken place. – God has come near.

And that brings us to the Collect. – In it we prayed, "O Lord, we beseech thee, let thy continual pity cleanse and defend thy Church." Here the word continual matters. We do not need God's pity only once. We do not need His help only when the crisis first comes. We need Him continually.

The Collect continues, "because it cannot continue in safety without thy succour, preserve it evermore by thy help and goodness." Here the prayer is very realistic about us. Because, we are not self-sufficient. We do not endure by sheer force of personality. – We need help. – We need mercy. – We need grace.

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And St. Paul tells us where that help takes root – "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love…" – Those phrases… rooted in love. – Grounded in love. – Not rooted in having every answer. – Not grounded in knowing exactly how the future will unfold. – But rooted in Christ.

St. John Chrysostom, commenting on this passage from Ephesians, says that St. Paul is praying for something greater than simple intellectual knowledge. – He wants Christians to grasp, as far as they are able, the greatness of Christ's love – and then to realize that it still exceeds them. – That is exactly what St. Paul means by a love that passes knowledge.

There is enough to know. – Enough to trust. – Enough to rest upon.

But with God, there is always more than we can measure.

And perhaps that is why the Christian can have peace – even when questions remain. – Not because the questions are unimportant. – Not because suffering is easy. – Not because grief disappears. – But because the love of Christ is deeper than the question. – We may not understand why the road turns where it does. – But we know who walks with us. – We may not know what tomorrow will bring. – But we know whose mercy is continual. –

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We may not understand every sorrow. – But we know the Christ who saw the widow – had compassion on her – and walked toward her grief. – And we know the Christ who has conquered death.

So, the prayer of St. Paul becomes our prayer – Strengthen us in the inner man. – Dwell in our hearts by faith. – Root us and ground us in love. – And help us to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.

Because in the end, faith does not mean that we understand everything. – It means that we know whom we trust.

And we can know this – The love of Christ is greater than our understanding – deeper than our sorrow – and stronger than death itself.

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