

“An Expansive Prayer” based on Ephesians 3:14-21  
Aspen Community United Methodist Church  
July 10, 2011  
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Ephesians 3:14-21 is a big prayer.  
It is just about the biggest prayer in all of Scripture.  
If you want to learn how to pray bigger prayers – here is a great model.<sup>1</sup>

Paul described how the church -  
is a central part of God’s great dream – God’s great plan for the universe.

This week we went to hear Brian Greene over at the Institute.  
Brian Greene is a quantum physicist.  
He suggests we may be part of many universes.

Our experience of space may be limited  
by the way light illuminates what we see.  
There may be parallel universes out there.

As he talked - I thought about Jesus  
and the Kingdom of God.

Perhaps the Kingdom of God is a parallel universe  
just out there waiting for us to touch and experience -  
and Paul is pointing us in that direction.

Paul describes divine love in a very expansive way.  
It made me think of the quantum physicist’s words.

Paul believes the church makes God’s purpose real in the world.

Let’s look at Paul’s prayer for the people of the church.  
Let’s hear it for us right now.

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First – he asks that you may be strengthened  
in your inner being through the power of the Spirit.

May the Holy Spirit present - within you - empower you  
so that you might live faithfully -  
so that you will be a part of the work of God.

Then Paul asks in this big prayer  
that Christ may dwell in your hearts -  
as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

He was asking that we make room for the divine in our lives.

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Paul is praying that you - the people in the church  
have the power to comprehend  
the breadth and length and height and depth of God’s love.

Let the fullness of God be within you.

With this fullness –  
you will accomplish abundantly far more  
than you can ask or imagine.

Yes – this is a big prayer.



What if you let this prayer inspire your prayers?

What if you let it teach you to pray big prayers?

Do you ever pray a big prayer for yourself?

Let’s try it here and now.

Pray this prayer in your imagination.

“Lord, fill me with the power of your Spirit.

May I have a profound experience of your love.  
and may my heart be continually  
expanded by your presence.

Fill me completely  
with the deepest and widest blessings  
and give me joy.  
Amen.”

*(pause)*

Hear how he describes God.  
God participates with us in life.  
God is able to accomplish far more than all we can ask or imagine.

Let it be a big prayer for your life? Give it a moment.

Let it be a big prayer for this congregation? Give it a moment.

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Our prayer might be that more people find  
meaning and purpose in life and  
a sense of belonging and fellowship  
by being right here – by being a part of this church.



I have considered my own prayer  
as we embark on a restoration effort for this church.  
I've been praying a big prayer - an expansive prayer.

It has helped me formulate a vision  
for Aspen Community Church.

Vision is important as we look at restoration  
for it is this historic structure  
out of which the work of the church happens.

My vision has four corners -  
and they are soft corners like the shape of this ceiling.

The first corner of the church is worship and music.

Worship that is inclusive and engaging –  
of things that are important in our lives.

Worship is where we engage the Bible and life -  
the stories and songs of old and new.  
God engages us collectively and draws out the best in us.

That worship will be varied.  
Like the traditional worship now  
and the contemplative worship this evening.

Worship may one day take the form of a rock band.  
For some that is a matter of tolerance  
and for others – it is the way to engage.

A big part of worship is music.  
We enjoy the hymns of the faithful old and new.  
We enjoy the classical music  
played on both the organ and piano.

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This room was made for music.  
This room is no doubt the best small venue  
for music in Aspen and this valley.

Let's never waste this space and its aliveness.

May it be a place for learning -  
whether with private piano students,  
or community performances,  
or our own Aspen Community Music Preparatory  
and our music camps like we had this week  
for children who live here  
or children on vacation with their families.

As we study music – we study the universe.  
We may actually be exploring the divine energy.  
Music seems to be part of the harmony of the universe.

God may just be dancing on the musical scale  
waiting for us to discover more and more harmony in our lives.



May we be good stewards of this sanctuary  
so carefully designed by its architect and builders.

Let's continue to care for it with the same loving touch  
that Teresa gives it each week as she  
dusts and polishes and vacuums -  
in such a way that it seems a prayer.

Worship and music is the first corner of my vision  
for the Aspen Community Church.  
We're already doing these things.

We just need to support them and spread the word.

The second corner of this learning and dialogue.

We do this and have done this for years.  
We just want to do more of it.  
We want to plumb the depths of sacred scripture  
to learn its importance for ancient peoples  
and discover its insights for today.

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We find God for our own lives in the stories of others.

Paula’s Bible study engaged many of us this past spring  
in the study of angels and messengers in our lives.  
We will study the parables this fall.

This should not be the only Bible class or the only book study.  
We want learning for different interests and different styles.

Let’s engage in dialogue in a few small groups from time to time.

We might grow into dialogue by hosting  
a theologian in residence every year or two.  
Bring a renowned theologian teacher or author  
to spend a few months with us.

Let’s take body, mind, and spirit seriously -  
and be a place for engaging great minds and great teachers.

This takes money -  
but that is what expansive prayers are for.

The third corner of Aspen Community Church is outreach –  
in the community and in the world -  
making meaningful relationships -  
being involved in building lives.

One life you will build will be your own.

It is also about justice and peacemaking.  
Peace will never emerge out of people that don’t know each other.

The United Methodists do this better than any denomination in the world.  
We’ve already begun this with Debbie Welden’s leadership.  
Let’s give more people the opportunity to expand their worlds.



And close by -  
we support something called the Day Center -  
for people who don’t have homes or work to go to.  
They can work on resumes – do laundry – and have a meal.  
We support the Aspen Homeless Shelter in the winter  
even host it here for a few weeks.

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To be relevant in a community is to pay attention to the needs -  
not just what is convenient.

What are the needs of others in the community -  
single people – young families – older adults?  
Learning enables vision.

We know very well the concern Jesus expressed for the poor -  
sometimes the forgotten and invisible -  
those who have a hard time finding or keeping a job.

We want to have an eye open for those in need.  
We do some of this church office every day.  
It is just usually invisible to the casual observer.

The fourth corner of Aspen Community Church is care.

We live in a place of extreme abundance and endless possibility.  
We also live in a place  
where depression, addictions, and suicide are high  
in comparison to other parts of the country.

We have studied it and in response to a study with the Univ. of Colorado  
we have the Hope Center – a referral center - and 24 hour hot line.

But we are short of counseling centers  
and high quality resources to meet the need for mental health -  
substance abuse and family therapy.

I see a pastoral counseling center in our future.  
I see a counseling center that offers professional services  
by persons trained psychology and theology  
in an interfaith manner -  
right here at Aspen Community Church.

We have begun conversation  
with the Aspen Valley Medical Foundation and the Iliff School of Theology  
about a possible mental health initiative for caregivers in this valley.  
They may come together as early as next year.

Yes – it takes money – but that is what expansive prayers are for.  
Remember Paul’s prayer:  
with the fullness of God we can accomplish far more than we might imagine.



Worship and Music - Learning and Dialogue  
Meaningful Outreach - Care

The four corners of a vital church.



Generations of people have sat in these pews and  
listened for the call of God in their lives.  
We are doing that now.

We are at a crossroads - a challenging time -  
a time to restore – a time for a new vision -  
or a time to say – it’s over.

That is our decision.



I’ve contemplated why I am here as your pastor at this time.

The image that comes to mind is the time  
I carefully removed eleven layers of paint on the door frame  
in a house built around the turn of the century.

I wanted to see what was there.  
I wanted to touch history with respect and reverence.  
I wanted to restore what had been built by a skilled craftsman -  
and rebuild what needed to be built anew.  
I wanted it to be enjoyed once again.  
I wanted it to be a home once again.

I won’t do much of the physical work.  
The skilled craftsmen and artisans will do that.  
Think of the jobs we will create for this town.

And I will work tirelessly with you to see what we can do  
mobilizing ourselves and anyone we know who can help.



I often think about who sat in these pews  
and who came to this altar with the big prayers of their heart.

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I think about the people who came before their Lord  
to ask for healing – to ask for forgiveness –  
asking for sustenance in hard times.

They came to baptize their young – to choose one another in marriage -  
and to say goodbye at the end of life.

They came to share the Lord’s Supper  
and break bread together.

Knowing the history of this place -  
I bet they came with big prayers.

Sometimes I feel I hear their murmurings.  
I feel their presence.

They are right there beside you.

You can be sure they made actual and real and tangible sacrifices in their lives  
so that you could sit in that pew -  
and kneel at this altar.



### *Generation to Generation*

If anything in the vision I set before you -  
touches a vision in you -  
I invite you to be part of it in whatever way you can.

The restoration of the Aspen Community Church  
will be a community effort.

Talk to your friends.

Talk to your neighbors.

Talk to people from everywhere who come here.

We’ve engaged engineers, architects, and builders  
to learn what is needed and how the process will go.

And to do it right will take just about \$4.9 million dollars.

That is why we have expansive prayers.

Let’s learn to be good at praying them.

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May this church be a blessing in your life  
and may you be a blessing in the life of this sacred space.

And may Paul’s great big prayer be one for you personally  
and may it be a good one for us today.

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> This phrase was adapted from Mark D. Roberts of Irvine Presbyterian Church