

“That doesn’t happen anymore...” It sure does! God points out generosity as proof of the gospel’s work in our lives. This year at our church has been filled with generosity. After our financial challenges a year ago, there’s been a big increase in our offerings. We’re ready to receive a new pastor this week! We’ve had dozens of gifts of all sizes come into our capital campaign, including some for tens of thousands of dollars. What a beautiful thing! The way you use your money is a clear indication of where your heart is. How deep Christ’s love has sunk. How wide it has spread. Jesus’ resurrection is changing us. It’s going deeper and deeper and wider and wider...

What an encouragement! We need that. We need each other’s help to grasp how wide and deep Jesus’ love is. Martin Luther was once going through a difficult time in his life. One day he came home from church and found his wife Katie wearing all black. He was surprised. “What’s going on?” Katie said, “Jesus died.” Martin said, “That’s crazy! What are you talking about? Jesus didn’t die again!” Katie said, “No, it’s true. Jesus must be dead or Martin Luther wouldn’t mope around here so sad!” What was she saying? If Jesus rose, how can that not affect our lives in every way? Moms—keep helping your children and your husbands grasp the love of Christ!

My sons love to throw rocks into lakes or ponds. Not little rocks, of course. Big rocks! When you throw a big rock in a pond, what happens? That rock sinks down deep, but as it sinks—you can picture this—the ripples spread across the entire lake, all the way to the shore. Deep and wide. That’s the power of the gospel—the “Good News from the Grave.” It’s great our kids are sharing the Easter message with us again today, because we need to hear it over and over again. It’s always Easter season! May you grasp how wide and long and high and deep the love of Christ is! Jesus’ resurrection changes everything.

**Acts 4:32-37**  
**Pastor Nathan Nass**

**Easter 5**  
**May 14, 2017**

**<sup>32</sup> All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. <sup>33</sup> With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup> There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales <sup>35</sup> and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. <sup>36</sup> Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), <sup>37</sup> sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.**

### **Deep and Wide**

Four weeks ago was Easter Sunday. Our church was full. It was a great day! Do you remember what Pastor Degner’s Easter sermon theme was? That’s a dangerous thing for a pastor to ask, isn’t it? “Of course we don’t remember, it’s not Easter anymore!” That’s why I asked. Here was the theme: “Jesus’ Resurrection Changes Everything.” So did it? Easter’s long gone. Life goes on. We go from one season to another. Now it’s soccer season or graduation season or planting season. In life, we’re always moving on to the next thing. Easter’s not on our minds! But if “Jesus’ resurrection changes everything,” Jesus’ love is meant to impact every part of our lives.

Here’s the way the apostle Paul put it: “*I pray that you ... may have power ... to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ ... that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God*” (Ephesians 3:17-19). There’s a song about that. Have you heard it? “*Deep and wide, deep and wide, there’s a fountain flowing deep and wide.*” Paul was talking to people who were already Christians. But he still had an urgent prayer for them: “I want you to grasp how deep and wide Jesus’ love is, so that you can be full.” God wants you to be full—to be filled up right to the brim—with God’s love. To be so full of Christ that there’s nothing else you need.

Are you full? Full to brim with the peace and love of Christ? I don’t think we are. Here are some signs we don’t grasp how deep and wide Christ’s love is. Do you catch yourself daydreaming about doing something great so people finally notice you? Then you’re not full. Do you need to drink a beer every night to find some peace? You’re not full. Is your life a constant race from one activity to another, trying to find fulfillment? You’re not full. Is it hard for you to be content with what you have? Then you’re not full. This is why Paul prays for us to grasp how deep and wide Christ’s love is! We don’t grasp it by nature. We don’t get it! We try to find something else to fill us.

Today the early Christians show us what it looks like when Jesus’ love goes deep

and wide into our lives. *“With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.”* Every day those disciples talked about Jesus’ resurrection. Every day! Was Easter just a season for them? No way! When they saw Jesus rise from the dead, everything changed. And people noticed. We’re told that *“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus”* (Acts 4:13). This change wasn’t superficial. The gospel had penetrated *deep* into their hearts. It filled them and gave them great power and courage.

Here’s how: In their worst moment, Jesus had still loved them and died for them. That’s love! They knew what guilt and sin feel like. And Jesus had taken them away. Then he rose again! He actually rose from the dead! *“No guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the power of Christ in me!”* They were full. Filled to the brim. It didn’t matter what they faced. They didn’t need everyone else’s approval. They had God’s approval! They didn’t need lots of money. They were filled with Jesus! They weren’t worried about dying. They were going to live with Jesus! That’s how deep Jesus’ love had filled their lives. They were so full of Christ that there was nothing else they needed.

Is that you? Is that me? Every person needs to be filled. You can’t deny it. We are always trying to fill up our lives. We fill up our lives with work. We fill up our lives with more activities than we can possibly do. We fill up our lives with stuff. We look for fulfillment in relationships or money or power. We struggle for approval or acceptance or praise from someone—from anyone! We’re striving to be full. But we’re not! Do you know what this all means? We don’t grasp how deep Jesus’ love is. So we feel empty. It’s awful feeling empty, so we chase after all sorts of things. We need to be filled—with something!

But did you catch the result of the disciples’ preaching about Jesus’ resurrection? *“Much grace was upon them all.”* It was preaching about Jesus’ death and resurrection—again and again—that built up much grace in the hearts of those believers. That’s what we need! We need Jesus’ love and forgiveness to go deep into our hearts. If you were to grasp the depth of Jesus’ love, you wouldn’t need that person’s approval. If you were to grasp the depth of Jesus’ love, you wouldn’t be crushed by criticism. If you were to grasp the depth of Jesus’ love, you wouldn’t be afraid of dying. If we were to grasp the depth of Jesus’ love for us, we would be full. It’s that deep!

But Jesus’ love isn’t just deep. It’s wide. When the gospel fills us deep in our hearts, it will have an impact on every part of life. Too often people say, *“My faith is just between me and God.”* We divide our life up into little sections. The church part. The family part. The sports part. The work part. The fun part. When we do that, we still don’t get it. We don’t understand how wide Christ’s love is. Jesus’ love is like a blanket on a bed or a wave sweeping over the ocean. It’s meant to cover every part of life. To affect every relationship, every job, everything. It’s wide!

There’s an amazing statement about the early Christians: *“All the believers were one*

*in heart and mind.”* It didn’t matter what race they were. It didn’t matter how rich they were. It didn’t matter who their favorite gladiator was. God’s love covered all that. It’s wide! The gospel of Jesus brings people together from all walks of life. Those Christians all wanted one thing—to go to heaven. They were thinking about one thing—to be faithful to their Lord Jesus. Nothing unites people like the gospel. Rich or poor, black or white, we’re saved by God’s grace through faith in Jesus. *“All the believers were one in heart and mind.”* The love of Jesus is wide.

It’s Mother’s Day today, and I heard something lately that would be great for moms and dads to think about: *“100 years from now, the only thing that will matter in the life of a child is their relationship with Jesus.”* Think about that: *“100 years from now, the only thing that will matter in the life of a child is their relationship with Jesus.”* That puts things in perspective. In 100 years, kids won’t be playing the sport or musical instrument that dominates their lives today. In 100 years—whenever their life ends—the only thing that will matter is their relationship with Jesus. How does that fact impact your life now? Is Jesus’ love spread *wide* in your family’s life? Does it affect all the decisions you make?

Here’s how wide Jesus’ love spread for those Christians: *“No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.”* Those believers recognized something radical—that we often don’t want to hear: Jesus’ love even changes the way we look at money. They looked at every possession, at every dollar, differently because of their faith in Jesus. Jesus had given up everything for them. Jesus had given everything to them—it wasn’t their own. Jesus had stored up treasure for them in heaven. Jesus’ love touched even their money. *“No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.”*

That sounds crazy! Other than “mom” or “dad,” what’s the first word kids learn to say? “Mine!” That never goes away. “That’s mine!” Why are we like that? We’re looking for something to fill us. It’s just that money never will. Remember the rich man who asked Jesus how to be saved? Jesus said, *“Sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me”* (Matthew 19:21). Remember what happened? *“When the young man heard this, he went away very sad, because he had great wealth.”* How much of our sadness is a result of not letting Jesus’ love spread throughout our lives—even to our money? Our homes are filled with stuff, but we’re not full.

The Bible gives us a great alternative: *“Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.”* This was a man for whom the gospel had a *deep* impact in his heart and a *wide* impact in his life. Jesus’ love had changed him so much that he got the nickname “Son of Encouragement.” Wouldn’t that be a nice nickname to have? What would be your nickname? One way he showed the impact of the gospel was selling a field and bringing all the money to the apostles. He didn’t have to. He wanted to! Jesus’ love spread wide in his life.