



Nothing Routine About Jesus' Love For Us
A Sermon on Ephesians 3:14-21

July 29th, 2018 ~ 10th Sunday after Pentecost
First Federated Church of Peoria, IL
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[Guilt] Routines can be very helpful with day-to-day life. If you have a good morning routine of breakfast, news, shower, dress, commute, you've freed yourself from thinking about a lot of small decisions that can slow you down or capture valuable brain space. You don't have to weight the pros and cons of each possibility. A good routine frees you from stuff like that. You simply flip on the autopilot switch, and go about the morning somewhat thoughtlessly. Routines can help make life easy because they get rid of need to think or notice.

I drive the same route every morning to church. There are, of course, plenty of different ways for me to go, but I always take the same one. I know it so well that I can tell you where all the potholes are, when traffic is going to be the heaviest and most congested, and how fast you need to be going to get all green lights. It has become so ingrained in my mind that, I can get to and from church without thinking about which way to turn. Once I hop in the car my mind goes into an autopilot of sorts.

One Saturday morning, I was planning on going to the grocery store. The first 10 minutes of that drive is the same as the drive to church. As you may guess, I didn't go to the grocery store as planned. My church driving routine had put my mind on autopilot. I miss the right hand turn I needed to make in order to get to the store. I ended up going way out of the way. Routines are helpful, but they also have consequences, like not noticing you've missed the turn and gone the wrong way.

Maybe you have a routine, which, at some point, has caused you to miss something too. Maybe you have a routine for your chores. You sweep the kitchen floor the exact same way every time, starting at the sink, working your way around the perimeter, always sweeping from the outside to the inside. Because you have the same pattern, you regularly miss the tight corner by the fridge. When your spouse crunches that Rice Crispy underfoot only five minutes later, you realize you've missed it... again... Routines can cause us to miss what is right in front of us.

Routines can also affect us at church. We, often, follow the same sequence of actions come Sunday morning. We park in the same spot, enter the same door, sit in the same place, we look at the same stain glass windows. Because of our Sunday morning routines, we can end up going through the motions of "church" without being fully present. Being on Sunday morning autopilot, we can miss some truly important things, reminders of who Jesus is and what he has done. Routines can prevent us from listening to the Holy Spirit to guide our actions. They can also prevent us from checking in with God, or prevent us from helping someone in need.

[Grace] In Ephesians 3:14-21, Paul invites us to pause for a moment and set aside the day to day routines, because he knows that they can keep us from noticing the vastness of Jesus' love for us. He prays that all people, in every place, and at every time would become aware of and understand the breadth and length and height and depth of Jesus' love. The Greek word used for love in this passage is agape, which means unconditional affection, goodwill, and the benevolence of God towards everything God has created. That is to say, Jesus' love for us is so immense that if we look at the universe - to the limitless sky above, to the depth of the earth and seas beneath, and to the limitless horizons on every side we began to get a small picture of just how vast Jesus' love really is. In his prayer, Paul, is pointing out that, we must, from time to time, intentionally disrupt our routines so that we see and grasp the immensity of Jesus' love.

Sunday morning autopilot, can keep us from seeing what is right in front of us. There is one ancient commentator who said the empty cross was a sign of the magnitude of Jesus' love for us. The upper arm of the cross pointing to the sky, the height of Jesus's love. The lower arm points to the earth, the depth of Jesus' love. The crossing arms point to the widest horizons, the breadth and length of Jesus' love. Jerome, an early church pastor once said that the cross reminds us that Jesus' love reaches upwards to include the holy angels. Jesus' love reaches downwards to include even the evil spirits. The length of Jesus' love covers all who are striving upwards. The breadth of Jesus' love covers those who are wandering away from him. Jesus love is immense. The cross stands as a reminder to us that Jesus' love for us is immeasurable. His love is as vast as the universe. His love is seen through the cross.

Looking at the cross on Sunday morning, or any other time, should disrupt us, shake us from our, sometimes, thoughtless patterns. The cross is too big to miss! It tells us of the vastness of Jesus' love. A love that's breadth is too far to walk from end to end to, its length too long to measure, its height to is too tall to see the top of, too depth to deep to find the bottom of. The cross is the universal symbol of Jesus' love for everything God has created: plants, fish, beasts, birds, creepy crawly things, and every single person.

[Gratitude] How do we respond to Jesus' love? We deliberately turn off the autopilot, take notice of cross, and spend our days looking for God's activity in this world. When we recognize what God is doing, we join in. A graduated youth group member is back in town for the summer. They asked if they could start a summer group here at church to talk about God, address the question of "why believe" and dive into the Gospel of Matthew. Of course, the answer is "yes. Yes, we can have a summer group." Every Sunday night for the last eight weeks the group of students have been meeting here at church. Together they have been peering into the vastness of Jesus' love. God is at work. We join in.

[Conclusion] Routines help with the day to day stuff. They eliminate decision making and free up our minds. There are times, however, when routines can cause us to miss some things, like a right hand turn or a Rice Krispies tucked in the corner. Unfortunately, they can also cause to miss breadth and length and height and depth of Jesus' love for us. So we, as Paul prays, intentionally make time to see the cross. For the cross is a constant reminder that Jesus' love for us is as vast as the universe.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.