

Text: Ephesians 5:8-20

Title: Living a Spirit Filled Life

Series: Living in the Fullness of God: The Letter of Ephesians

Date: 10 October 2021 - Thanksgiving Sunday

For: Community CRC, Kitchener, ON

We began this worship series on the letter to the Ephesians by looking at Paul's prayer for the Ephesians in Chapter 3:

I pray that out of his glorious riches the Father may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

And we've focused our attention on just what it looks like to be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

To be filled to the measure of the fullness of God means our lives are saturated with the grace of God that moves us from being turned inward on ourselves and outward to others and to God in a movement of deep gratitude.

To be filled to the measure of the fullness of God means our lives are empowered to be wall-breakers and peace-makers, following the example of Jesus who tears down the dividing wall and invites us to join him in this work of unity - acknowledging the ties that bind us.

To be filled to the measure of the fullness of God means our lives are rooted in the way of love lived out in kindness and forgiveness and compassion and a committed love that reflects the love of God for us in Jesus.

And in our portion of Paul's letter, we read that to be filled to the measure of the fullness of God means our lives are no longer lived in darkness but are light to those around us - light that exposes the darkness of the world and illuminates the shadows.

Paul has worked in contrasts throughout his letter: death versus life, division versus unity, obedient versus disobedient. But no where is this contrasting more compact and dense than here in our passage this morning. Paul layers contrast on contrast like a kid building a tower of blocks:

light versus darkness
wise versus unwise
drunk on wine versus filled with the Spirit
foolish versus discerning

The letter to the Ephesians is considered a letter to the newly baptized across various congregations in Ephesus. It's Paul's words of instruction and identity to those new to the faith and new to following Jesus. Verse 14 is considered to be a snippet of liturgy or hymn from one of the earliest baptism liturgies of the church:

Wake up, sleeper,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.

Paul works in such stark contrasts because he's teaching and unpacking just what difference it makes for the lives of these new Christians that they have been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

And this difference isn't just for their comfort, but for how they live their lives now. Their way of life. How they walk through the days of their life. Following Jesus isn't just some decision of the head, but of the whole person - head and heart, mind and soul, strength and weakness, hands and feet.

Paul's prayer that every one who belongs to God in Jesus may know the scope of God's love for us isn't just to make us warm and cozy and comfortable. But it's a prayer that we may know just how much God's love changes who we are and who are called to be as those filled to the measure of the fullness of God.

Because that fullness is not just for us.

This fullness overflows into our lives, our families, our workplaces, our neighbourhoods.

The love that fills us overflows and washes away hatred.
The peace that fills us overflows and breaks down walls.

The forgiveness that fills us overflows and mends what is broken.

The light that fills us overflows and chases away the darkness.

And in a world held in the shadow of darkness, division, hatred, and division, this overflowing of the Spirit's presence, of faithful Christians living out their baptism, is so desperately needed.

A short time after the initial upheaval of the Reformation, a deep darkness settled on Europe. New religious identities gave fuel to already existing power struggles and political greed and war broke out. Thirty years of fighting and violence that decimated cities and towns and people's lives.

Toward the end of that long war, a pastor named Martin was the only remaining minister in his German city. Because the city he lived in was walled and afforded some protection, refugees streamed to it - hoping for a respite from the violence, some degree of protection from the darkness outside. But inside the walls, food was scarce, hunger everywhere, and in a particularly awful year, an epidemic swept through the overcrowded cities where so many sought refuge.

And Martin, this German pastor, remained in this place of darkness.

Martin was the only minister left who could perform funerals and care for the bodies of the dead. And he did. On some of the worst days, he would lead 50 funerals. And one of the thousands that he buried outside the city walls was the body of his wife.

Martin's faith was not about his own comfort. Far from it. He was hungry like everyone else. He grieved like everyone else. This pastor knew the darkness of what we're capable of and the vulnerability of our fragile bodies and those we love. And still he lived as a child of the light in his city of shadows and death. With every funeral he led, every body he blessed and honoured as a precious child made in the image of God, he exposed the cruel darkness of the war around him that said every body is dispensable.

Martin was also a dad. And when he came home and sat down at the dinner table, he knew he had to help his children find a way to understand the world around them. Thirty years of war left his children with no understanding of a world at peace. And the empty chair at the table reminded them of their own loss as a family.

So he wrote a dinner table song for them. And taught it to them. A dinner table song they sang every evening before they ate whatever meagre meal was on the table. This is what Martin taught his children:

Now thank we all our God with heart and hand and voices
Who wondrous things has done in whom His world rejoices
Who from our mother's arms has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us
With ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us
to keep us in his grace and guide us when perplexed
And free us from all ills in this world and the next

All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given
The Son and Spirit blest who reign in highest heaven
The one eternal God whom earth and heaven adore
For thus it was is now and shall be evermore.

In the darkness of a long war and illness and in the shadow of their own grief, this family joined their voices together at the dinner table, singing from their hearts, a song of thanks to the God who holds them. And this little song of thanks sustained this family in the darkest of times.

Their dinner table song of thanks brought light into a dark place.

One way that we know God is answering Paul's prayer for all those who follow Jesus to be filled with the measure of all the fullness of God is that our lives, even in the midst of shadows and darkness, overflow with thanksgiving to our God.

So, today, this weekend, as we gather around our own tables and around God's Table of grace, may you, being rooted and established in God's love, be filled with the Spirit,

speaking to one another with simple songs of thanks,
singing from your hearts to the Lord,
and always giving thanks to God the Father for everything,

in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Light that shines in the darkness and whom the darkness cannot overcome.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church, and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations, for ever and ever.

Amen.