

SERMON: "FILL 'ER UP!"

SCRIPTURE: EPHESIANS 1:15-23

DATE: JULY 5, 2015

Ephesians 1:15-23 (NIV)

¹⁵ For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Was it only this past winter that the price of a barrel of crude oil went down to about \$50 and our gas prices were around 85 cents a litre?

It seems a very long time ago since we paid 85 cents, especially now that gas is hovering around \$1.20. Strange thing is that the cost of crude oil is still very low---under \$60 a barrel.

Cars are important to us. We need them and they need gas so we don't seem to have much choice. Still, every time I go to the gas station and fill 'er up, I wince.

In our Scripture lesson the Apostle Paul speaks of being filled up with power. The cost was great but the benefits were eternal. Fortunately, no wincing was required!!

Paul began his letter to the Ephesians telling them of his joy in knowing they had such a good reputation as a Church.

He was pleased and proud of them. He remembered them in his prayers giving thanks for them and asking for God's blessings to be bestowed richly upon them.

The blessings he sought for them are interesting because of what they are and what they are for.

These weren't to be material blessings but spiritual blessings.

These weren't to be received and held on to. They were to be spread out in ministry.

Paul's desire for the Ephesians was for them to be filled with wisdom and revelation so they might know God even better. He prayed that they might have the hope of the Gospel as a foundation for their lives. He sought for them an understanding of the wonders of the spiritual inheritance that was theirs.

But the blessing Paul emphasized was power---the power of God--the incomparable power that raised Christ from the dead---the power that defeated death, sin and Satan---the power that saw Christ and His Church making the difference in all the world.

These blessings weren't just for the Ephesians to enjoy and hoard. They were the foundations---the makings---the raw material of ministry.

The ministry of individuals wasn't the emphasis though. Paul concluded with the idea of these blessings filling God's people---who in turn filled the Church---which in turn filled the world:

"22 And God placed all things under (Christ's) feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."

The Body of Christ---the Church---is to have the fullness of Christ and His power within it so that everything in the world might be effected. The power and influence of the Church works through those who are members of the Body.

That's us!

As the blessings of God are a part of our lives we are to overflow with influence to touch the world.

It's very much like the image of the champagne glasses that are set up on top of one another so that, as the champagne is poured into the top glass, it overflows and fills up the next level and the next level and so on.

The more we are filled, the more the Church is filled. The more the Church is filled, the more the world is filled with the good things of God's power, grace and love.

Sadly, many nowadays prefer something a little less filling.

Something that one observer called THE LITE CHURCH. Here is its tongue in cheek ad:

"Has the heaviness of your old fashioned church been weighing you down?

Try us! We're the New and Improved Lite Church. Studies have shown we have 24% fewer commitments than other churches. We guarantee to trim off guilt, because we are Low-Cal...low Calvin, that is.

We are the home of the 7.5% tithe. We promise 35 minute worship services, with 7 minute sermons. Next Sunday's exciting text is the story of the Feeding of the 500.

We have only 6 Commandments---your choice!! We use just 3 gospels in our contemporary New Testament entitled 'Good Sound Bites for Modern Human Beings.' We take the offering every other week, all major credit cards accepted, of course. We are looking forward with great anticipation to our 800 year Millennium.

Yes, our New and Improved Lite Church could be just what you are looking for. We are everything you want in a church...and less!!"

Less filling---and it doesn't taste great either!

Less filling isn't what Paul was talking about. Paul saw the Church made up of people with the very power of God surging through their lives. They had a power that could not be contained. It had to burst forth, with the power of others, so that the Church itself became the very presence of God in the world.

Eugene Peterson's translation of verses 22-23 makes Paul's perspective clear:

"At the centre of all this, Christ rules the Church. The Church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the

Church. The Church is Christ's body, in which He speaks and acts, by which He fills everything with His presence."

What a magnificent job description!
What a wondrous calling!

That's us!
That's what we are to be about.

We are not peripheral to the world as the world would have us believe. We, the Church, are central to everything because we are the very Body of Christ---the presence of God in the world that God has created and loved and redeemed as God's own.

As imperfect as we are as Christians and as imperfect as the Church has been and remains, our calling to be Christ to the four corners of the world has an inspiring quality about it that's hard to ignore.

There is so much the Church can do.
There is so much power available to us to make a difference.

It's really all about power.
The power of God in people.
The power of God in the Church.
The power of God through people.
The power of God through the Church.

It was a bitterly cold day in a western city. A small boy stood shivering on a steel grate in the sidewalk. His clothes were thin and tattered. He was indeed a child of the street.

A lady, appropriately dressed for the weather, stopped and engaged the youngster in conversation. The compassionate stranger took him to a clothing store and outfitted him from head to foot, including cap, scarf, and gloves.

The lad was filled with joy and gratitude. He couldn't thank her enough.

As they said goodbye and walked in opposite directions, the elated boy turned back to ask, "Are you God's mother?"

The gentle lady answered, "Oh no! I'm just a child of God."

Whereupon the smiling lad remarked, "I knew you were related."

Oh, how we are related!

Filled with the blessings of God and joined together in congregations, in denominations and in the universal Church at large we have the power to change the world. Indeed, in the last 2000 years, the Church of Jesus Christ has changed the world in vast ways that we now take for granted.

The filling of Christians hasn't stopped. The filling of the Church remains God's greatest way of making a difference to people inside and outside our faith.

Russ Blowers is a minister and active in the Indianapolis Rotary club. Each week, at the club meetings, a different member gives a brief statement about his job. When it was his turn, Russ said:

"I'm with a global enterprise. We have branches in every country in the world. We have our representatives in nearly every parliament and board room on earth. We're into motivation and behaviour alteration.

We run hospitals, feeding stations, crisis pregnancy centres, universities, publishing houses, and nursing homes. We care for our clients from birth to death.

We are into life insurance and fire insurance. We perform spiritual heart transplants.

Our original Organizer owns all the real estate on earth plus an assortment of galaxies and constellations. He knows everything and lives everywhere.

Our product is free for the asking. (There's not enough money to buy it.)

Our CEO was born in a hick town, worked as a carpenter, didn't own a home, was misunderstood by his family, hated by enemies, walked on water, was condemned to death without a trial, and arose from the dead---I talk with him every day."

We, in the Church, have nothing to sell.

We have the very wisdom, revelation, hope, inheritance and power of God to give away.

As individuals we decide the fate of the Church.

Will we seek to be filled by the One who longs to pour His blessings into us?

Will we take what we have received and give it away without cost or judgement or condition?

William Barclay once wrote, "The pity is that the Church can be so harmless that it would not be worthwhile to take the trouble to crucify it."

May we not be harmless!
May we not be lite and less filling!

May the world not be able to say that the Church of Jesus Christ
is peripheral!

May we, instead, prove how central the power of our Lord is, not
just to us but through us to the world!

May we stretch ourselves to find more space within us and then
proclaim with great anticipation and joy,

"Fill 'er up, Lord, fill 'er up!"

(1572)