

“Filled with the fullness of God”: Ephesians 3:19-21

Fourth Sunday of Lent – March 14, 2021

Tom Mount – Holy Trinity Chico

Scripture – Eph 3:17-21

“I pray... that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

Introduction

1. In this text, we find the crescendo of this prayer as well as a concluding doxology.
2. Today, we will look at vv. 19-21.

We are made to be “filled with the fullness of God” – v.19

1. The apex of the prayer: “that you may be filled with the fullness of God”. This is the final purpose clause and it’s what the whole prayer has been leading up to.
 - v.16 that God would strengthen you
 - v.17a that Christ may dwell in your hearts
 - v.17b that you may have strength to grasp the love of Christ
 - v.19 that you would be filled with all the fullness of God
2. So what does it mean to be filled (*pleroo*) with something?

- “Filled with sorrow” (Mk 14:19)
- “Filled with anger” (Matt 21:15)
- “Filled with jealousy” (Acts 13:45)
- “Filled with joy” (Acts 13:52)

3. To be filled with something is to be in its grip: to have that thing become the controlling influence in our actions/behavior (cf. Eph 5:18).

4. To be “filled with the fullness (*pleroma*) of God” means that God is the controlling influence at a given moment governing your feelings, desires, thoughts, hopes, relationships, words, actions, reactions, calendar, check book, etc. At any given time, you may be hangry, sad, lonely, righteously indignant, but you are not allowing those emotions to control you. You are continuing to walk in the Spirit.

5. To be filled with the fullness of God is to be conscious of and yielded to God’s presence, strength, care for others, spiritual authority, moral excellence and character (holiness, righteousness, love).

6. God wants us to be filled with his fullness both individually and collectively, as the Church of Christ. First, collectively.

- As the Church, God wants to indwell our little community to such an extent that everyone knows that he lives here.

7. Second, individually. God wants to fill you so that you image him to others. You were fashioned to be godlike (Gen 1:26; Eph 4:23-24).

- Jesus is the first of “many brothers and sisters” (Rom 8:29).
- This is our *telos*, our end, the “Why?” of our existence. Friedrich Nietzsche: “Those who have a 'why' to live, can bear with almost any 'how'.” (quoted by Viktor E. Frankl in *Man’s Search for Meaning*).
- Our transformation is gradual and incremental (2 Cor 3:18). Begins as seed (God’s “sperm”, 1 Jn 3:9) and continues “until Christ is formed in you” (Gal 4:19).

- CS Lewis: “It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship.”

God employs his infinite power to ensure that this happens – v.20

1. Power is *dunamis*: “dynamite”. How much power does Paul say God has to “fill us with the fullness” of himself? *Huperekperissou*: “infinitely more abundantly.”
2. Andrew Lincoln describes the progression of Paul’s thought. God is able to do:
 - what you **ask for** in prayer
 - what you fail to ask for but what you **imagine**
 - **all** that you ask or imagine
 - **above** all that you ask or imagine
 - **abundantly** above all that you ask or imagine
 - **infinitely** abundantly above all that you ask or imagine
3. Where is this power? “Within us.”
4. This is great news for us as we struggle each day to live in continuous communion with him, say no to temptations, be led by his Spirit, and extend grace to others.

God is worthy to be praised now and forever – v.20-21

1. This brings first half of letter to close same way it began in 1:3, with praise to the Father.
2. “Glory” is *doxa*, Lincoln: “splendor of his exalted status, honor, radiance, power.”
3. This is a doxology: a message (*logos*) of glory (*doxa*) about God.

4. "In the Church" – Peter O'Brien: "The Church is the masterpiece of God's grace."
5. "In Christ Jesus" – the locus of all salvation.

Lenten exercise

· This week, pay attention to the movements of your spirit both toward and away from God. Ask yourself throughout each day: Am I now "filled with the fullness of God" or with the fullness of something else? If the latter, don't condemn yourself but gently move back into a place of communion, rest and empowerment in Christ. Thomas Merton observed: "Your life is shaped by the end you live for. You are made in the image of what you desire...To be an acorn is to have a taste for being an oak tree."