

September 25, 2011
 First Baptist Vancouver

Text: Ephesians 5:15-21

Title: "Be Filled With the Very Life of God!"

(Series: "Navigating An Alternative Reading of Reality")

Be filled. Be filled. Be careful how you walk. Walk wisely. Understand what the will of the Lord is. Be filled. Be filled with the Spirit. Be filled with the Spirit of God. With the Holy Spirit. With the Breath of God. With the Wind of God. With the River of God. With the Source of Living Water. Be filled with the Spirit.

It is the last "therefore" in a series of "therefore-s" in the apostle Paul's letter to the believers in the first century city of Ephesus. Not the last exhortation. That distinction belongs to: "Finally, be strong in the Lord. Put on the full armour of God." But, "be filled" is the last in the series of "therefores". It is the "therefore" that makes all the other "therefore-s" possible.

To help us understand, to help us feel what the apostle of Jesus Christ is after in the text, let me read all the other "therefore-s" in his letter, and then immediately follow each with the last "therefore," "be filled with the Spirit." Chapter 4, verse 1 – "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called." "Be filled with the Spirit." Chapter 4, verse 17 – "Therefore, walk no longer as" un-believers do, walking "in the futility of their minds." "Be filled with the Spirit." Chapter 4, verse 25 – "Therefore, laying aside all falsehood, speak truth, each of you with their neighbor ... be angry but do not sin ..." "Be filled with the Spirit." Chapter 5, verse 1 – "Therefore, be imitators of God ... and walk in love." "Be filled with the Spirit." Chapter 5, verse 7 – "Therefore, ... you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of the Light." "Be filled with the Spirit." Chapter 5, verse 15 – "Therefore, be careful how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise." "Be filled with the Spirit." Chapter 5, verse 17 – "Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." "Be filled with the Spirit." Chapter 5, verse 18 – "Therefore, do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation," emptiness. "Be filled with the Spirit." It is being filled with the Spirit, with the Spirit of God, that makes it possible for us to live all the other life-enriching exhortations Paul gives us in his letter. Including the "finally be strong with the Lord."

"Do not get drunk with wine ... but be filled with the Spirit." Paul speaks this way not because he is a tee-totaler. Paul speaks this way not because he thinks drinking wine is evil. "The days are evil," he says. And therefore always fraught with all kinds of potential pit-falls; over-drinking wine and other spirits being but one of them. He speaks this way not because he is an up-tight moralist. He speaks this way because in Ephesus people were abusing wine. And, as in our day, abusing food and work and entertainment

and religion. You see, life in Ephesus revolved around the goddess Artemis, as the Greeks called her, Diana, as the Romans called her. The Temple of Diana in Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Much bigger and grander than the new BC Place. Diana-Artemis was the goddess of the hunt and of the moon. And of fertility and pleasure. Expressed in statues in her honor: a woman with many breasts. By the time Paul writes his letter, the Temple was known for its “worship events” that involved “ritual drunkenness and frenzied behavior” (Thieman, 357). Worshipers would come under the control of Diana by coming under the control of wine.

“The days are evil,” says Paul. He would also say, “the days are good because Jesus Christ has come.” Paul could have echoed Charles Dickens famous opening to *A Tale of Two Cities*: “It was the best of time, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of darkness ...”

Paul speaks of “the days are evil,” because people were being so incredibly foolish. They thought they could find the fullness of life in un-restrained sexual activity, and by being caught up in euphoria induced by drunkenness. “Dissipation,” Paul calls it. “Wasted,” as we say in our way. “Wasted” with nothing to show for it. Except a lot of brokenness and more gnawing emptiness.

Paul speaks this way – “do not get drunk with wine” -because something very fundamental to our wholeness is at stake. What we seek to fill us controls us – clearly so with alcohol. What we seek to fill the emptiness gets a hold on us and begins to drive us. What we seek to ease the emotional pain, what we look to for “a little boost” to keep us going, slowly, but surely, begins to master us. Too much over-drinking, is but one example. Too much over-eating is another. Too much over-working is yet another. Too much television, too much Internet, too much Texting. Too much coffee. Too much anything other than the Spirit of God eventually leads to dissipation, to waste.

“But be filled with the Spirit.” The only filling that finally fills.

You have heard me say, in other sermons, “The question is never, ‘Will I be a disciple?’” Every human being is a disciple ... of someone, or of some ideology. Every person walking on the sidewalk outside along this Sanctuary is a disciple ... of someone. Every person we work with during the week is a disciple ... of someone. Every world leader is a disciple ... of someone, or of some ideology. So the question is never, “Will I be a disciple?” The question is always, “Whose disciple will I be?” If not Jesus’, then whose? The question is never, “Will I be impacted by a spirit?” Everyone is impacted by a spirit of some sort. The question is always, “of all the spirits at work in the world ... of all the spirits at work around me ... to which will I respond? To which will I yield?” The question is never, “Will my life be influenced by a spirit? Will I allow a spirit to direct and control my life?” The question is always, “Of all the spirits active in our city, which spirit, whose spirit, will I allow to influence me, to direct and control my life?”

“Therefore ...” The last “therefore” in his letter. “Therefore, be careful how you walk, not as unwise people, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine” – or with food or work or toys – “for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.” The “therefore” making all the other “therefore-s” in the letter to the Ephesians possible.

Be filled. Be filled. Be filled. With the very life of God!

Now, just for a moment, step back and look at the specific context in which Paul gives this exhortation. The context is Ephesians chapter 5, verse 15 to chapter 6, verse 9. Very carefully crafted as one unit. Here is how it goes together. There is first a series of “not – but;” “not this, but this.” Then there is a series of manifestations of living the “not-but.”

Thus, this
 And this
 And this ...
 And this ...

Then the last “this” is worked out in three spheres of life.

This sphere.
 And this sphere.
 And this sphere.

More concretely. The three “not-but.”

Not walk as unwisebut as wise.
 Not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is.
 Not get drunk with winebut be filled with the Spirit.

Then four manifestations, or results, of the “be filled.”

All participles. Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord. Always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; Being subject to one another in the fear of Christ. A number of translations render all of these as commands: speak to one another, be subject to one another. They are not commands; they are results of obeying the big command to “be filled with the Spirit.” And then the last manifestation, or result, of being filled – “being subject to one another in the fear of Christ” – is worked out in three relational spheres. Wife and husband. Children and fathers. Servants and masters. Wives being subject to husbands; AND husbands being subject to wives. Children being subject to fathers, parents; AND parents being subject to children. And servants being subject to masters; AND masters being subject to servants. Bringing into

being a whole new kind of humanity! God's! A new society, as John Stott puts it. And the one major exhortation making it all happen: "but be filled with the Spirit."

Earlier in the letter Paul spoke of being "sealed with the Holy Spirit." Chapter 1, verses 13-14. "In Him (in Christ), you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him (in Christ) with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of your inheritance." When anyone believes in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, we are given the seal that He now has us. Jesus, as it were, stamps us as His own with His own seal of ownership: He gives us His Spirit. The same Spirit Who rests upon and lives in Him. The same Spirit Who animates His obedience to His Father. Jesus gives the Spirit as a seal of ownership and, as a pledge, or down-payment on all His promises. Wonderful!

Earlier in the letter Paul spoke of being "indwelled" by the Spirit. Chapter 2, verse 22 – "In whom (in Christ) you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." Chapter 3, verse 16 – Paul prays that we be strengthened with power "through His Spirit in the inner person." When anyone believes in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, He comes to take up residence in our lives, in our hearts and souls, through His Spirit. It is what makes a person a Christian, a Christ-in-one. His life now dwells in us.

But although we are sealed with the Spirit, and although the Spirit comes to live in us, He may or may not be filling us. A fact, to which I think all of us in this room who are believers can testify. Think being a house. The Spirit comes to seal the house as belonging to Christ. The Spirit comes to live in the house. But He may or may not actually fill the house. He does not fill all the rooms. Not hard to imagine. Thus the exhortation, "be filled with the Spirit." The verb Paul uses means to "completely fill." And it means to bring something "to completion." Paul is saying to us: you are sealed with the Spirit, and the Spirit has moved into your hearts and souls. Now be filled. Be completely filled. Let the sealing and indwelling have full effect. Be filled up. With a Person. I want to stress this. The Spirit is not just a force or influence. Which is why the NT never speaks of the Spirit as "it." It is always "He" or "Him." A Person. As personal as Jesus in whose name He comes. As personal as the Father from Whom He comes. Be filled with a Person! A Person who thinks; a Person who acts; a Person who feels; a Person who has an agenda!

Who is fully Divine. Fully God. The third person of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. A very creative Person! Who in the beginning hovered over the chaos and darkness, and brought the world into being. Who "in the fullness of time" overshadowed the womb of the virgin Mary, and brought the God-Man into being. Who then animated the body of Jesus of Nazareth, enabling Him to do all He did for the world. Be filled with that Person. Be filled with that God.

By the way, do you see what a huge complement Paul is paying us? He is saying that, we humans are so wonderfully made that only the Living God in the person of His Spirit can fill us! No other spirit can do it. However good, no other spirit can fill us. We are too

grand a creature. So grand the only reality that can finally fill us is the very life of God Himself! It is in the passive voice – “be filled with the Spirit.” Active voice – “I fill.” Passive voice – “I am filled.” Why does Paul use the passive voice? Because he is talking about something we cannot make happen. “Filled with the Spirit.” We cannot make it happen. THE most essential factor for living the Christian life; indeed, the most essential factor for living life at all. And we cannot make it happen ourselves. We cannot fill ourselves with the Spirit. Paul puts it in the passive to help realize our utter dependence on God. We cannot fill ourselves with the very life of God. I cannot make it happen for you; you cannot make it happen for me. No religious gimmicks, no spiritual gymnastics, can make it happen. Only God can do it. Only God can fill us with God.

And Paul puts it in the passive voice because we cannot control what happens when He does not fill us. We have no control over the Holy Spirit. Would you agree that much “Religion” is finally all about controlling the Divine. Trying to fit the Divine into our rituals and programs, and strategic plans. Which is why “Religion” can be so life-less; the Spirit will not co-operate with our attempt to control Him. “Be filled.” Passive. We have no control. We are, after all, talking about the Wind of God, the mighty Ruach Adonai. We are talking about the Fire of God. We are talking about an un-tamable River of glory. Yet, it is a command. “Be filled ...” is in the imperative mood. A command. Meaning that somehow we have a role to play. We cannot control or manipulate the Spirit of God. But we do have a role to play, or we would not be commanded, “Be ...” “Be filled ...” Not just friendly advice. Not just encouragement for the spiritually weak and empty. A command.

So, what is our role? Decide. Choose to be filled. Desire to be filled. Open up to being filled. Ask to be filled. The Holy Spirit – might as He is – is a gentleman. He ordinarily waits to be invited to fill. Asked to be filled. Note also that it is in the present tense. In the Greek language tense has more to do with kind of action than the time of the action. The present tense emphasizes continuous action. So the command is, literally, “keep on being filled.” The implication being that being filled by and with the Spirit is an on-going phenomenon.

Partly because as we grow and learn and become new creations there is more to fill! As we move out in ministry, we need more of the filling. In the book of Acts we read of the same persons and groups being filled a number of times. On the day of Pentecost, the 120 disciples are together in the Upper Room. And they are filled with the Spirit (2:4). Then Peter and John meet a crippled man begging for money. And they are filled again, enabling them to speak a word of healing. The infant church comes under persecution, and as they meet to pray, they are filled again (4:31). Stephen is chosen as one of the first deacons because he is obviously filled with the Spirit (6:10). And then later, after preaching a powerful sermon before the Jewish Sanhedrin, he is filled again (7:55). Peter goes to the house of the Roman soldier Cornelius and preaches the gospel to Gentiles. And they are all filled with the Spirit, Peter again. On it goes through the book of Acts. We are not filled just once. The filling is too dynamic a reality for any “once-for-all-ness.” We are filled again, and again, and again as we move forward in discipleship.

And the filling is continual because we often stymie the filling. Earlier in the letter Paul spoke of “grieving the Spirit.” Chapter 4, verse 30 - “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by Whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” In his first letter to the believers in Thessalonica, Paul spoke of “quenching the Spirit.” Chapter 5, verse 19 – “Do not quench the Spirit.” We, mere humans, can grieve and quench the Spirit of the Living God? Apparently. How? By our attitudes, by the way we speak to and about one another, by holding grudges, by refusing to forgive one another, by hanging onto bitterness, by playing games with the truth, by toying with the things of the darkness. Causing the Holy Spirit to “back off,” so to speak. You who have walked with Jesus Christ for some time have experienced it a number of times. Have you not? I have. We do something offensive to the Spirit, and it feels as though “the air goes out of the room.” Well, it does. The Wind of God stops blowing. He quits breathing His refreshing breath. He does not leave ... thanks be to His grace. But He does “back off,” and let us have something of the implications of our anti-kingdom attitudes and speech. It is painful when it happens. He seems to “hold back” His vitality. Not that He is “touchy,” or an easily wounded narcissist. It is just that He takes us seriously; He takes our attitudes and speech seriously. If we do not want the way of the Holy He “backs off.” And we experience again the emptiness and lost-ness and dis-orientation of un-holi-ness. So because we can grieve and quench Him, we need to “continually be filled.” And in His mercy He loves to do it ... again and again and again.

What is our role in the “continually be filled with the Spirit”? Decide. Decide we want to be filled ... mysterious as it all may be. Desire to be filled. Confess anything we think might be in the way of being filled. And confess our fear that we might be taken where we had not planned to go. The fact is, He will take us to new places spiritually. So part of our role is to confess our fear and let go of our need to control our destinies. Decide you want to be filled. And drink. Yes, drink. Take a big drink. Could not Paul say it that way? Given his reference to being drunk with wine? Instead of trying to ease the pain by filling our souls with wine, drink the Water of Life, the Very Life of God.

This is what Jesus invites us to do. At the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, or Sukkoth, held in early October. (I have described what this Feast is all about in the book, “Who Is Jesus?”) It was at that Feast that the people of God celebrated God as Light, and where Jesus made His great claim, “I AM the Light of the world; whoever follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). And it was at that feast that the people of God celebrated God as the giver of water. They remembered with gratitude and joy that out in the desert God made water to flow from the rock. They remember with great anticipation the fulfillment of God’s promise to one day pour out what He called “living water” on parched and thirsty human souls. On the great day of the Feast, while the people are singing from the prophet Isaiah, “With joy you will draw water from the springs of salvation” (12:3), Jesus stands up, and cries out, “If anyone is thirsty,” ...and who is not? Who is not thirsty? Look at the long lines outside our city’s pubs, people waiting hours to get inside to drink ...something ...something to make life ‘life.’ Jesus knows why we stand in such lines; He knows what we are thirsty for. “If anyone is thirsty, come to Me and drink.” And when you do, says Jesus, “From your innermost

being shall flow rivers of living water.” This, says the apostle John who remembers Jesus’ invitation, Jesus “spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive” (John 7:37-39)

When was the last time you had a good drink? When was the last time you drank Living Water? Why not do it today? Take a big, long drink. And then drink again tomorrow morning, and Tuesday morning ... and every morning the rest of your life. Wake up, and say to the Living Lord, “I am thirsty ... let me drink again.” Or, breathe. That too Paul would say to us. Breathe. Breathe in. Breathe in deeply. Breathe in the Breath of Life. With your whole being ... breathe...in. When was the last time you took a deep, deep breath of God? Why not do it today? And then tomorrow morning, and Tuesday morning and every morning the rest of your life. The word for Spirit in the Greek is pneuma – breath – and comes from which we get the English word words “pneumatic”: Live pneumatically:

Wake up, everyday and say to the Living Lord, “As I breathe in the air around me, Lord, let me breathe in Your Life.”

*“Breathe on me, breath of God, fill me with life anew;
that I may love whatever You love, and do what you would do.*

*Breathe on me, breath of God, until my heart is pure,
until with You I will one will, to do and to endure.*

*Breathe on me, breath of God, so that Your will is mine,
until this earthly part of me glows with You fire divine.”*

[Edwin Hatch, 1835-1889].

And when He does ... when He breathes on us, when He gives us a drink, when He fills us again with Himself, we find ourselves speaking to one another differently – “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs;” we find ourselves singing and making melody to the Lord; we find ourselves giving thanks even in the crummiest of circumstances; and we find ourselves being subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Which we will grapple with next Sunday around the Lord’s Table. Be filled. Be filled. Be filled. With what? With the very life of God! With the church throughout the centuries let us sing: Veni sancte Spiritu. Come, Holy Spirit.