

Filled with the Spirit of Unity

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Sermon prepared for **20 August 2006**,
twelfth sermon.¹

Reading: **Ephesians 5:15-21**
(15 minutes)

Theme: *"We need the filling of the Holy Spirit to participate in God's purpose to unite all things under Christ"*

Introduction

"Do not get drunk on wine which leads to debauchery," says Paul. "Instead, continue to allow the Spirit to fill you up; speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs; singing and making music in your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Eph 5:18-21)

Paul describing what the church should look like – our witness to the world. These descriptions – speaking, singing, thanking and submitting – are all results of being "filled with the Spirit".

So what is this, 'being filled' and why is it so important to Paul?

In the previous verse (17), he says we must understand what God's will is, and then he immediately says we must be filled with the Spirit. So there must be a link between the filling of the Spirit and God's will.

Let's go back to the beginning.

Exegesis

God has a **purpose** for the universe and it busy working it out in history.

Read Chp 1:1, 4-5, 9-10a. Highlight the key purposeful words: will, chose, predestined, good pleasure, purposed, etc.

What is God's purpose? "To bring all things, in heaven and on earth, together under one head, even Christ" (1:10b). All about **unity**, but not just the unity of the local church as in his other letters. Rather it's the unity of all things – "in heaven and on earth". This is the emphasis on reconciliation – we are reconciled to God and we have a ministry of reconciling people to people. Not just unity for unity's sake – all about bringing us all under one head – Christ.

During this age – from Christ's ascension to his next coming – this purpose is being worked out through the **church**. "And God placed all things under his (Christ's) feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (Eph 1:22-23). So the Church is the place where God manifests this new unity – hence the image of 'one body'. But also, the Church is the proclamation of this unity – the headship of Christ – to the world.

In all of this, the **Holy Spirit** is central. If we, as a church, are not united, God's spirit is unable to dwell richly among us. So Paul says, "In him (Christ) you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (2:22). Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6), but here Paul is saying that the church also becomes a kind of temple of the Holy Spirit. We need to be built together – brick by brick, joined by mortar, with Christ as our cornerstone. Then, and only then, God is able dwell among us in his Spirit.

But we cannot manufacture this unity ourselves. We can only do it with the enabling of the Spirit. So, to help us in this calling, we are **sealed** with the Holy Spirit, "You were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until

the redemption of those who are God's possession" (1:13-14). This sealing happens when we become Christians – if you are saved you have the Holy Spirit – he resides in you. The deposit means that we now already can experience something of what is yet to come, viz the unity of all things under Christ. So the Spirit enables the church to experience and manifest unity.

So here's the crux of it. We need the Spirit to become unified, and we need to be unified for the Spirit to dwell among us.

The trick is to keep in step with the Spirit (Gal), in fellowship with him, and this is what Paul means when he says that we must "be **filled** with the Spirit" (5:18). This filling means that we are completely relinquished to the desires of the Spirit. The Greek suggests that we should, on a continuous basis, allow the Spirit to fill us up. And what happens when something is filled up with something else? There is no room for anything else, and it overflows. So the image here is that when the Church is full of the Spirit, the Spirit will overflow from the Church into the world.

Think of the **vision** that Marijke told two weeks back – water flowing out of the windows of St Martins. The idea is that the Spirit wells up within our parish like a spring of living water. And we are so filled with the Spirit that His love, power, healing, unity and joy spill out into the community around us. Unless we are full of the Spirit, this cannot happen. We hear this in the language of the following verses, which roll out from v18 – speaking, singing, making music, thanking and submitting. All of these are manifestations of the fullness of the Spirit.

So, God's eternal purpose is that all things be reconciled to himself, brought into unity, under the headship of Christ. The role of the Church in this age is to both manifest and facilitate this reconciliation and unity. To achieve this we need the Holy Spirit – in full measure – filled to overflowing.

Application

This all means at least two things for us – two things that are so interwoven as to be almost one:

Firstly, we must strive for unity. This is the centre of God's purpose for us. Unity does not mean uniformity – part of the richness and strength of our parish is our diversity – our different church backgrounds, our different beliefs about how to worship God, etc. But this diversity must come under the headship of Christ, must submit to His lordship. This requires us to speak to one another in song, to submit to one another, because of our reverence and love for Christ.

Secondly, we must open ourselves to the filling of the Holy Spirit. We need to allow ourselves to be vulnerable to him. We need to relinquish our own passions, desires and needs, and allow him to be our beginning and end, our all in all. Be open to his working in our parish, perhaps even in fresh ways.

And when we do these two things, we are participating in God's purpose for the world, viz to reconcile all things together under the headship of Christ.

Amen.

Notes used in preparation

Ephesians is about (1) God's eternal purpose, (2) which he is fulfilling through Jesus, and (3) which he is working out through the Church.

God has an Eternal Purpose

- 1.1 An apostle by the will of God
- 1.4 He chose us
- 1.5 He predestined us
- 1.5 In accordance with his pleasure and will
- 1.7 In accordance with his grace
- 1.9 The mystery of his will
- 1.9 According to his good pleasure
- 1.9 He purposed in Christ
- 1.10 Reached their fulfilment
- 1.11 We were also chosen
- 1.11 Having been predestined
- 1.11 According to the plan of him
- 1.11 Conformity with the purpose of his will

What is God's Eternal Purpose?

- 1.4 To be holy and blameless in his sight.
- 1.5 To be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ.
- 1.10 To bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.
- 1.12 Be for the praise of his glory.
- 2.7 To show the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in kindness to us in Christ Jesus.
- 2.10 To do the good works God has prepared in advanced for us to do.
- 2.15 To create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace.
- 2.16 To reconcile both of them to God through the cross.
- 3.6 Through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members of one body.
- 3.10 The manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in heavenly realms.
- 3.19 To be filled with the measure of all the fullness of God.
- 4.10 To fill the whole universe.

The Central Role of the Holy Spirit

The spirit dwells in us – 2.22: And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

The Spirit is a seal/guarantee – 1.13: You were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance.

The Spirit helps us pray – 6.18: Pray In the Spirit on all occasions.

The Spirit gives us access to God – 2.18: We both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

The Spirit reveals God to us – 1.17: The Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know God better.

The Spirit unites the Church – 4.3: The unity of the Spirit, the bond of peace.

In Summary

God's eternal purpose then is to reconcile humanity to Himself and to each other, bringing us together as one body under the headship of Christ, in order to make God known to the cosmos.

Eph 1:9-10 He made known to us his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

Eph 1:22-23 And God placed all things under his (Christ's) feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

In Our Passage

Contrast between wise & unwise, understanding & foolish, filled with Spirit & drunk on wine.

Be filled with the Spirit,

Speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs,
Singing and making music in your heart to the Lord,
Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything,
Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

This is a description of how we live out our faith in Christ, in order to display God's manifold wisdom to the world. What is the witness of the Church in the world/cosmos? How we relate to one another and to God within the Body of Christ. An articulation of what it means to be One Body.

Outline?

God's purposefulness

– walk through vv1-10

God's purpose – to unite the world/cosmos under Christ. Vv9-10

Our place in that – v11-12

The place of the church in this – vv22-23 – our role of facilitating and demonstrating this unity.

The role of the Holy Spirit

= deposit

= enabler

= source of unity

Be filled – ongoing, like breathing

Acts 2:4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Acts 4:31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Acts 6:3-5 Filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom / faith

Acts 13:9 Paul was filled with the Spirit and confronted Elymas the sorcerer.

So, being filled with the Spirit is (1) an absolute necessity for service. Equipping with authority and power to do God's work. (2) necessary for daily Christian living – to produce fruit.

How will this be manifest?

= consideration

= joyfulness

= gratitude

= submission

ⁱ This was an odd sermon to prepare. When I first looked at the text, I thought I'd preach on music (v19). Then I began to find the whole passage rather odd – bitty, with no clear flow of thought. Placing it in context of the preceding paragraphs did not help any. So I went back and did a study of virtually the whole letter, and began to recognise that if the theme of the letter is unity under Christ, then the filling of the Spirit is as aspect of this unity. When I realised that vv19-21 are actually clauses under v18, then it began to fall into place. I wanted highlight some the key themes of the letter – unity, the Church, the Spirit.

Having got all of this, though, I struggled to find the clear and simple message of the whole. Usually God helps me find a unitary theme that holds the whole sermon together. This time I couldn't find it, which left me feeling anxious right up till Sunday. Ultimately, the application, which came to me on Saturday, felt like an adequate holding together, with the sermon itself helping to unfold a long chain of ideas that build on one another.

People seemed to appreciate it. Hopefully it adds value. We are coming through a rather tense period in the life of the parish, with the data projector screen having come down two weeks ago. There has been growing tension and distance between those looking for a more charismatic, contemporary style of worship and those wanting to hang on to a more tradition, liturgical style. The screen became a focal point for this tension. Although I was primarily following the themes of the text, I feel the integration of the themes of unity and the Spirit, within the context of God's purpose for the cosmos, was timely.