

“Being Filled with God’s Fullness”

a sermon by the Rev. Marsha E. Brown,

Pastor of New Horizons Presbyterian Church, Overland, MO

Ephesians 3: 14-21

Focus: Those who seek the God of love and all creation will not be disappointed.

Function: Encourage us to know and be known by God, not just know ABOUT God.

A few weeks ago I decided to rent a car in Mexico and drive 3 of us to an artists colony about 45 minutes north of Cabo San Lucas. It was a beautiful drive; mountains near the deep blue ocean, and the road was in pretty good shape. There were a few surprises in driving;-like a semi-trailer suddenly being stopped in the right lane with little warning, or torn up road with few markers and not in as much time as I really need to see them, and one very speedy, reckless car who almost hit us as I was moving from the right lane into the left to get around the semi....but we had fun anyway. And we will certainly do it again-I just won't be the driver! Familiar roads are a lot safer with my eyes.... On the way back we had to fill up the car, so I pulled into a gas station. A gas station attendant came to the car and asked how much? I said fill it up, por favor. How long has it been since you have had a gas station attendant assist you with filling up your tank? I was kinda in shock for a minute or two. Senora, how much gas do you want?..... Fill it up gracias! all full. A full tank of gas into the car rental place is a good idea for saving money.

Fullness of God is the theme of this passage that we have before us in the letter to the Ephesians. It seems to be an overheard prayer-written for the church in Ephesus and/or other early churches, but said to God. The author, probably not Paul, is referring to Paul's sufferings for his calling. Listen for God's Word to you as I read from Ephesians 3: 14-21.

“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your heart through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

God’s fullness is a topic that the Old Testament covers quite well. Several instances are mentioned of God’s fullness or glory.... “The wilderness tabernacle, once completed, was filled with the cloud of divine presence, (Exodus 40:34-38). At the completion of Solomon’s temple, the glory of God comes down to fill the ‘holy of holies’ , the back of the worship area (I Kings 8:10-11). Ezekiel’s vision of the new temple of purified Israel leads to the same scene: the glory of God fills the new temple of a future restoration (Ezekiel 43: 2-5).”¹ God’s fullness or glory is meant to be present when God fills a space or a person.

This last Thursday night at Audrey Bowdish’s visitation and funeral, it felt like a fullness of God was present. People were coming and going and greeting each other-some from friendships many years ago. Memories were shared and laughter as well as tears were present. Smiles were prevalent. God was there at that time- and it seemed to last even longer for some of the family members who were so surprised that so many people came to be with them and to remember Audrey. It was a blessed time of God’s presence being palpable here in this place.

¹ Sally Brown, Commentary on Ephesians 3: 14-21, www.workingpreacher.com, July 28, 2012.

I have seen the glory of God in our basement too. Especially in the last few weeks when we have had an utter abundance of meat for every family. People's eyes get big when we tell them they get 3 choices of meat and one can be a 'big meat' - about 1 and ½ foot package of chicken or ribs or steaks! And that they can take all the fresh wonderful looking produce they need! Thanks to the St. Louis Area Food Bank who sees that we give abundantly and has food to share from retail stores to give us twice a week: Monday and Friday afternoon (if you have time to help). God is abundantly blessing the Ritenour Co-Care Community pantry with weekly deliveries of good nutritious food dropped at our door twice a week by the pallets. And God's fullness is filling the tummies of over 1200 people a month for 3 or 4 days at a time. This food ministry is God's doing-not ours-as hard as the volunteers and this church have worked to create it. God is a God of abundance. And when you give abundantly, you see blessings.

I think this 'abundance thinking' applies to how we give in all of our lives, including money given to the church. God calls us to be abundant givers of our time, our love, our grace, and our money. This creates a like-minded community that does the same. Who knows what the future will be with provision made for it now?

God's abundance was prevalent in Ephesus too-in the different races and cultures in their community. The church in Ephesus was composed of many different kinds of people—"every family in heaven and on earth" in other words, diverse. There were non-Jewish people there and people from many different cultures as well as Greek speaking gentiles. I am sure they had to work at understanding each other! Communicating- that is; saying what you want to be heard-as well as listening to the other—is critical when there are such differences, especially. We who all speak English have to spend time to communicate not just the content of what we are saying, but the way we want to be understood too. Sometimes this is a lot of work. "High Maintenance" as

we used to say a few years back when someone took too much time to explain, console, or reassure than you had time for. But you know what? We are meant to work and grow together. Not just this church community but this Overland community. One preacher says that “God forges us into communities, and then it takes nothing less than the power of the Trinity to keep us there. The prayer in this passage suggests that progress will be slow—a crop inching toward fruitfulness, a building rising brick by brick, both anchored in a love that can do what knowledge cannot (v. 9).”²

This love, this grace, this power, this glory of God is nothing we can muster or manage or hold on to. “It is utter gift. God chooses to live among us. God’s glory fills us. This is sheer grace, unimaginable possibility, life-giving hope.”³

All we have to do is open our hands/hearts/eyes/ears and receive this abundance! When we do, it changes us. Then we start to know God for who God is; the great lover, the great forgiving parent, the One who knows us better than we know ourselves. This is not knowledge ABOUT God, but knowledge OF God. That is what transforms us into being more like Jesus, who brought wholeness to everyone he met. Jesus, who pointed to the God of abundance to help us here and now to know the breadth and length and height and depth of God. May it be so. Amen.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.