***“The Fullness”*** by S. Finlan, at The First Church, May 16, 2021

**Ephesians 1:17–23**

17I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, 18so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, 19and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe. . . 20God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. 22And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, 23which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

**Luke 24:45–53**

45Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 46and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, 47and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48You are witnesses of these things. 49And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

50 Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. 51While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. 52And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; 53and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Welcome here today. We welcome everyone who comes to worship with us. We are grateful and we are blessed by your presence. All are welcome. In Ephesians we have a mention of “the fullness.” What is “the fullness”? First let’s look at that term as it occurs in Colossians, where it may be a little clearer. It says “in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (Col 1:19), and also “in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9). These passages say that Jesus is not only divine but divinely complete. He embodies all of God that we could imagine a human person embodying—and *more* than we could imagine.

The Ephesians passage describes Jesus being complete in all ways, in ways that could be seen and ways that could not be seen. In Ephesians, “fullness” is focused on power and authority, since it is preceded by “the immeasurable greatness of [Christ’s] power” (1:19) and by his being placed “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named. . . And he has put all things under his feet” (Eph 1:21–22). But the author swiftly moves over to the church, “which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (v. 23). So the fullness here might refer to the full and complete Christian family. Or it might refer to the fullness of power in Christ, into which his family is plugged.

It is certainly the cosmic Christ who is in view here: not just head of the church, but also head of all things, including the “rule and authority and power and dominion,” four words that occur in other passages to describe the powers in heaven or in the angelic realm, sometimes along with the word “thrones” (Col 1:16; 2:15; Eph 6:12). He is saying that the cosmic Christ, ruler of all things and of all heavenly powers, is also the head of the church, which can be called his body.

So it’s not just the details and extent of his spiritual and earthly authority that is being highlighted, but his capacity of nurturing, similar to the way our limbs are nurtured by our circulatory and respiratory systems. In just this way does Christ nurture the parts of his body, the family of believers. Just as food is absorbed and the nutrients sent out to every cell, so when we as individuals take up Jesus’ words, the spiritual nutrients of Jesus are distributed along lines of spiritual intention into our whole person.

With our physical bodies, the growth and maintenance is mostly automatic, but with spiritual nurture, it requires our freewill choice; our decision to participate is essential. It is always our choice. The fullness could refer to the whole spiritual circulatory system that connects us with Christ, when we choose to join with him and follow God’s will.

Then we have the ending of the Gospel of Luke. It starts with some of the things he said on the occasion of his first resurrection appearance to the eleven apostles, about Scripture being fulfilled, forgiveness of sins being proclaimed to all nations, and the disciples being clothed with the spirit (Luke 24:47, 49). In other words, the fullness of time had come for the divine visitation to take place, the message of salvation to be broadcast, and believers to be clothed in power on Pentecost. When the moment is right, everything flows. The Gospel of Luke ends with Jesus taking them out near the village of Bethany, and then ascending into heaven. This message of forgiveness, of the pouring out of the spirit, and the ascension of the divine Son speak of a fullness of time and the inauguration of a new era.

But let’s talk about fullness in our own lives. Sometimes our lives don’t seem quite full, right? Most of us feel that our lives are not perfect. Some moments seem adequate, or good, even *very* good, but maybe not *full* to overflowing. Some aspects of our lives seem to be in transition. Sometimes we take steps to improve our physical life: we take more walks or cut down on sugar. To grow spiritually, we pray more first thing in the morning or last thing at night. We make a decision to take action, for instance, to argue less often with our partner, to look for commonality in behavior or sensitivity. And these things help. They really do. But a sense of real fullness of life doesn’t always come when we want it to, or it does come when we don’t expect it. Some unexpected good happens long after we took some corrective action. Maybe it is beyond our conscious power to be able to *arrange* a thoroughly *full* life. We can work to make it *fuller*, but maybe we can’t just fill it all the way up, at least in this lifetime.

What we can do is appreciate the fullness of divinity in Jesus. We can gain inspiration every day by thinking about his balanced and kindly character, his human nature. That can inspire our behavior, enable us to be more loving. We can appreciate the appropriateness of Jesus’ choices and decisions, and be inspired to make appropriate choices in our lives. We can trust the life giving power revealed in his healings and in his Resurrection, and be confident that his power continues in our afterlife. We can gain confidence in this life and in the afterlife by contemplating Jesus’ fairness and mercy. It makes us trust that God is fair and merciful, too. This was a big breakthrough for me in my young adulthood, giving me an idealistic optimism about God’s fairness that I still have today. Knowing the fullness of Christ is of great value to us. We will have less stress in times of strife, calmness in the midst of the whirlwind.

Now, I am offering you some sureties here, but I left one thing unsure earlier in the sermon. I said that maybe we cannot make our lives full to overflowing. But I want to say that we *can* make our lives fuller, and our mental sureness more full, too, by our faith and by our decisions. And by letting Jesus’ words settle into our hearts, training ourselves in faithfulness, we can be surprised by how some of his sayings come true for us, such as when he said “that your joy may be complete” (John 15:11), and when he said “Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38). When we really experience Jesus’ love, whether in our prayer life or in our encounters with Jesus-blessed people, we can experience that feeling of fullness and warmth.

May your day and your week be blessed with fullness and surety, confidence and love. May you grow to more fully understand the power of Jesus in his earthly and cosmic realms. But most importantly, may you grow to appreciate the fullness of Jesus in your life. May his words illuminate your pathway through green pastures.