

You Can Be Filled
Series: Lifted UP!
Ephesians 3:14-20; John 2:1-10
October 2, 2016

Welcome again to worship.

Now, before I begin today, I want to let you know some things about this coming week. Myra and I will be flying commercially to Chicago on Thursday for a one day conference on the future of the United Methodist Church on Friday. We will fly back Friday night. Then Saturday morning, we will be flying the Dayton Pilots' Club airplane to St. Simon's Island, Georgia, on the Georgia/Florida coast. It's the home of the South Georgia Annual Conference Retreat Center. They will be flying back home on Monday. We would appreciate your prayers.

So next Sunday, we will have a guest preacher, and it will be a treat. Rev. Wendy Lybarger, the assistant to the District Superintendent here in the Miami Valley District, will be the preacher. She is a wonderful preacher, passionate follower of Christ, and my friend. Therefore, I hope you will make every effort to be here, for my sake, for the church's sake (because you know she's going to report to the DS about how Germantown is doing), and for your own sake, because I know she will bring an inspired word to you.

Today, we are concluding our series "Lifted UP!" We are drawing from a passage from John 12:32, where Jesus says:

"And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself."¹

We have seen how Jesus lifts us up by making us God's children, by showing us that we matter, and that we can have a new life. This is all possible because Christ was lifted up on the cross.

Today, I want us to see that when we lift Jesus up in our lives, He lifts us up and fills us.

As I have been preparing for our flight to St. Simon's, I have been studying and reviewing the route.

Well, as I have been planning, I know that it is 525 nm from Dayton Wright Brothers to the airport on St. Simons, and depending upon the winds, it should take us around 4 hours to fly what would be 12 hour drive. With full fuel, we should be able to fly for at least 5 hours. So I will make sure we are fully fueled before we take off because you don't want to run out of fuel when you're flying. You can't just pull off the side of the road and walk to the nearest gas station. So I'll make sure we have more than enough fuel to make it.

Do you know anyone who only puts a few bucks in the gas tank at a time? I have a son like that. He only puts maybe \$5 in the tank at a time because he doesn't watch his finances very well. Myra and I have rescued him twice in the last year or so because he ran out of gas.

You know, there are people out there who live their lives on "E", with only a little bit in their spiritual tank. They are not taking advantage of how Jesus can fill them up.

I want us to look at a wonderful passage of Scripture, so grab your Bible and turn to Ephesians 3. The letter to the Ephesians was written by Paul while he was in prison

¹ John 12:32 (NLT)

for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In what would seem to be a horrible situation, Paul writes this incredible letter. So turn to Ephesians 3, starting with verse 14. And you are going to need to grab your bulletin and turn to page 6, because we have a note-taking guide for you this morning.

Ephesians 3, starting with verse 14, and I will be reading from the New Living Translation.

When I think of all this...²

When I think of what? What is Paul thinking of? It is like when my Greek teacher would say, “When you see the word for ‘therefore’, you have to ask yourself, ‘What is the therefore there for?’” So what is Paul thinking of?

So you look at what he says in the previous verses. But look at verse 1.

When I think of all this...³

Same words as in verse 14. Between verse 1 and 14, Paul goes off on a tangent. So in verse 14 he repeats what he wrote in verse 1 to help us connect his train of thought. So we have to look before verse 1 to see what he means when he says, “When I think of all this...” What is in chapter 2 that Paul is so excited and moved about? Well, there seems to be 4 things, and here’s where you can take some notes.

First, that we can be made **alive in Christ**. Alive in Christ.

Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else. But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead.⁴

We talked about this last week. When we lift Christ up in our lives, He gives us a new life. Paul says we used to live in sin, but now verse 4-5:

But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead.⁵

So in chapter 3, verses 1 and 14, Paul is thinking about being alive in Christ.

Second, we have received **grace through faith**.

(It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus. God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God.⁶

The NIV translation says in verse 8:

² Ephesians 3:14a (NLT)

³ Ephesians 3:1a (NLT)

⁴ Ephesians 2:1-5a (NLT)

⁵ Ephesians 2:4-5a (NLT)

⁶ Ephesians 2:5b-8 (NLT)

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God...⁷

At a comparative religions conference, the wise and the scholarly were in a spirited debate about what is unique about Christianity.

Someone suggested what set Christianity apart from other religions was the concept of incarnation, the idea that God took human form in Jesus. But someone quickly said, “Well, actually, other faiths believe that God appears in human form.”

Another suggestion was offered: what about resurrection? The belief that death is not the final word. That the tomb was found empty. Someone slowly shook his head. Other religions have accounts of people returning from the dead.

Then, as the story is told, C.S. Lewis walked into the room, tweed jacket, pipe, arm full of papers, a little early for his presentation. He sat down and took in the conversation, which had by now evolved into a fierce debate. Finally during a lull, he spoke saying, “what’s all this rumpus about?”

Everyone turned in his direction. Trying to explain themselves they said, “We’re debating what’s unique about Christianity.”

“Oh, that’s easy,” answered Lewis. “It’s grace.” The room fell silent.

Lewis continued that Christianity uniquely claims God’s love comes free of charge, no strings attached. No other religion makes that claim.

Buddhists, for example, follow an eight-fold path to enlightenment. It’s not a free ride.

Hindus believe in karma, that your actions continually affect the way the world will treat you; that there is nothing that comes to you not set in motion by your actions.

The Jewish code of the law implies God has requirements for people to be acceptable to him, and in Islam, God is a God of judgement not a God of love. You live to appease him.

Only Christianity dares to proclaim God’s love is unconditional. An unconditional love that we call grace. Grace is all about God and God freely giving to us the gifts of forgiveness, mercy, and love.

Third, Paul is thinking about **salvation** as well, so write down salvation.

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.⁸

We have been saved from the penalty of our sins through the cross of Christ. When Christ was crucified, your sins and mine sins were placed on Jesus. That’s why Jesus said from the cross:

“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”⁹

Theologians believe it was at that moment that the ugliness of all the world’s sins were placed on Jesus, and because God cannot tolerate sin, He turned away, and for the first time ever, Jesus felt alone, separated from God. He did all that for you and me. And Paul marvels because we have received salvation.

Finally in chapter 2, we see that Paul is thinking about **oneness and peace with Christ**.

⁷ Ephesians 2:8 (NIV)

⁸ Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT)

⁹ Matthew 27:46 (NLT)

In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ. For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death. He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near.¹⁰

COMMENT

So that's what Paul is thinking about in chapter 3 verse 1 and 14, that we are alive in Christ, we've received grace through faith, as well as salvation, and that we now have oneness and peace with Christ.

So jump back to chapter 3, verse 14.

When I think of all this, I fall to my knees...¹¹

Paul says that when he thinks of these things, he falls to his knees.

Our natural and immediate response to what God has done should be **worship**. Write down "worship" in your notes.

You know, I love the United Methodist Church. I first learned of God's love through Christ in the United Methodist Church, I became a Christian in the United Methodist Church, I grew in faith in the United Methodist Church, I received my call to ministry in the United Methodist Church, and I have served in ministry for what will be 32 years next month in the United Methodist Church. I love our theology, I love our polity, our outreach and mission, I love our heritage.

One of the things I wish we were better at is our expression in worship.

COMMENT

In his book "The Purpose Driven Life", Rick Warren highlights 5 things to have a purpose driven life and church: worship, fellowship, discipleship, mission or service, and evangelism. These are 5 things every Christian and every church should be about... at least while we are on earth. And Rick says that the most important is worship, and it's the only one that we will do in heaven.

Think about it. When you get to heaven, you will be in complete fellowship with God and one another, you will have been perfected in the discipleship, there will be no more mission or service or evangelism because everyone in heaven is a believer. The only one of the 5 purposes we will do in heaven is worship, and we will do that for eternity.

I wish we in the United Methodist Church were more expressive in our worship. That should be our natural response when we think of all God has done for us.

Ok, enough of that little soapbox rant. Let's get back to Ephesians 3. Paul says in verses 14-15.

¹⁰ Ephesians 2:12-17 (NLT)

¹¹ Ephesians 3:14a (NLT)

*When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth.*¹²

Then he lists 4 things he prays God will give the Ephesians. Write these down.

First, he prays for **strength**.

*I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit.*¹³

Second, he prays for **a heart filled with Christ**.

*Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him.*¹⁴

Third, he prays that they would be **grounded in love**.

*Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong.*¹⁵

Finally he prays that they would **know the love of God**.

*And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully.*¹⁶

Have you ever watched the trophy presentation at the Super Bowl or the NBA finals or the Stanley Cup finals or the Indianapolis 500? The winners grasp that trophy, kiss it, and hug it. That's the same imagery that Paul uses here. To grasp the knowledge of the love of God as you would some tremendous achievement, some trophy.

And what happens when Paul's prayer is answered? The second sentence of verse 19:

*Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.*¹⁷

Fullness of life and power that comes from God. No running out of gas. No becoming weary or burned out. No settling for mediocre faith and religion. But fullness of life and power. That's what Christ does when we lift Him up. He lifts us up to fullness of life and power.

THE WEDDING OF CANA OF GALILEE

Write this down: Jesus takes my **emptiness** and **fills me up**.

¹² Ephesians 3:14-15 (NLT)

¹³ Ephesians 3:16 (NLT)

¹⁴ Ephesians 3:17a (NLT)

¹⁵ Ephesians 3:17 (NLT)

¹⁶ Ephesians 3:18-19a (NLT)

¹⁷ Ephesians 3:19 (NLT)