

All The Fullness of God

Colossians 1:11-20

November 25, 2007

We conclude our series on what Scripture teaches us about the church this morning. As we begin, it makes sense to take just a few moments to see where we have been:

- Jesus is building the church upon the confession that he is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. The church is the gathering of people who make that profession of faith.
- The church is in the habit of gathering together for worship. Worship involves the devotion to the apostles' teaching (Scripture) and fellowship, the breaking of bread (sacraments) and the prayers.
- Those gathered to worship have confidence because we are justified by faith – the grace of God (and not the results of works, lest any one should boast). By faith righteousness has been reckoned to us, faith that Christ's promises are true and we are washed clean by his blood for us.
- Those gathered in Christ's names are also broken apart by the Holy Spirit with the commissioning command to "go." Believers are called to "go" and make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to obey all that Jesus commanded.
- The church is not surprised by the hardship, persecution, and opposition it receives; rather, it rejoices even in its suffering when that suffering is for Christ's name's sake.
- The church is aware of its responsibility to leave a legacy; recognizing the duty to pass along the faith it received from the saints who have gone before us.
- The people of the church are called to build up themselves and each other: paying attention and growing in their relationship with the living God; paying attention and growing in their relationship with each other; and participating in giving with a generous heart.

So, why do we do all these things? Where is it going?

We are going to the coronation of the king.

Believers need to keep their eyes on the big picture. It is so easy to get lost – particularly if we look at church as a place where can get something. When we see ourselves as the center of the world, the center of everything that is important, we miss the bigger picture. But we need to remember that how we often see things is not how Scripture often tells things: John the Baptist heralded Jesus' arrival, "Prepare ye the way of the LORD!" Do you remember Jesus' opening words of ministry? "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is near; repent and believe the good news."

Jesus followed that announcement with a tour, gathering people for the journey he was taking. So it is with the church: we do not exist simply to gather here on this campus, we are gathering here on this campus to go forth as disciples of Jesus on the road toward the coronation ceremony

in the kingdom of God. We are going on a journey of discipleship and adventure, serving the King of kings.

The purpose of church is not to help you live a better life, it is to pay tribute and worship the king. That it does help you live a better life on the way is a bonus, but if you are coming to church to get something out of it, you are missing the bigger picture.

Today is the culmination of the church's calendar year – it is Christ the King Sunday. It is a celebration of the sovereignty of God; it is a celebration of the promises God made, it is a celebration of how God fulfilled the promises in Jesus Christ; it is a celebration of the hope we have of the full realization of the kingdom of God in the future. Everything we do is subject to the authority of the king. Everywhere we go we are subject to the authority of the king. Everyone we meet is a subject of the king. The King is Jesus.

Colossians is written to a community of new believers. Paul was writing to them from prison. Think about that for a moment: he is in prison – experiencing real, human, and earthly suffering – and yet holds onto the perspective that serving Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God is a good thing. He was writing to believers in a church he did not start; it was founded by Epaphras, who was a friend of Paul and Timothy's. The letter was written as an encouragement to these people as they began to experience real, human, earthly suffering. If you read the whole thing you can see that Paul is warning them to remain focused on the big picture: the glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Paul warns them how they should be careful to avoid being taken off the road, off on detours of other things. Do not be distracted.

Pay attention to what is important.

You may have heard or seen the true story about Jason McElwain. Jason was a senior at Greece Athena High School in Rochester, New York. He had autism. He did not speak until he was age 5 and was slow in developing social skills. When he tried out for the school's varsity basketball team, he did not make it; although, to the coach's credit, it was because Jason was only 5'6". Even so, because he was so well liked by the players and by the coaching staff, he had become a part of the team as team manager. He kept stats, ran the clock, handed out water bottles, and was a great encourager.

Before the last home game of his senior year, the coach told Jason to suit up. He put on a uniform. No promises; just maybe. Word got out. Students came with hastily made signs supporting J-Mac. Late in the second half, it seemed that Greece Athena had a comfortable lead. With about four minutes to go in the game, the coach stood up and called Jason's number. The place went crazy.

Very quickly, the ball was passed to Jason on the wing where he fired up a shot, but missed it badly. Undaunted, the next possession, he went for a layup; missed again. Jason's father, David, wasn't worried. "The thing about Jason," he said, "he isn't afraid of anything."

With just under three minutes to go, Jason got the ball and launched another three point shot. Swish. The crowd erupted. A few moments later from behind the three point line, another basket.

Again and again. Before he was done, he had tied the school's record with six three-pointers. The last one went through with just two seconds to play and as the buzzer went off, the crowd – even the opposing players and cheerleaders – stormed the court and carried him off in triumph.

Video was shown over and over on ESPN and many of the major networks. Jason became emblematic of the possibilities for people with autism.

But what's important for us here today – what is important for Christians – is Jason's take on the whole thing. You see, Jason never took his eye off of what was important. He was put in the game to play, and he played. "I don't care about this autistic situation, really," he said. "It's just the way I am. The advice I'd give to autistic people is just keep working, just keep dreaming. You'll get your chance and you'll do it." He was happy, he was pleased; but he remembered why he was doing what he was doing – he kept his eye on what was important.

And so it is with the church. We just keep working at growing in Christ, just sharing with others the joy of following Christ, and just keep dreaming of the day the kingdom will be realized fully.

We are on the road with the one who is first.

So, not only are we on the way to the coronation of the king, we are on the road with the king who is to be coronated. It matters what road you travel.

In a pluralistic religious culture, we get used to hearing "all roads lead to heaven." Or, people might begin to talk about "it does not matter what you believe, just as long as you are sincere in your belief."

Scripture is clear that this is not true. If it were true, Jesus would not have walked the road he walked. "If there is any other way," he says in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Let this cup pass from me." It did not.

Think about it: if you were to give directions to an out-of-town friend in order to meet here in this sanctuary, would you say, "Don't worry about it, all roads lead to Chula Vista Presbyterian?" No, because it is not true. You would give step by step detailed instructions because there are plenty of ways to get lost or arrive at places that are not Chula Vista Presbyterian Church. Or, "don't worry about it, as long as you are sincere in what you believe, you will find the church." How long would you wait for someone to whom you had given those directions? How many of you – wives, perhaps in particular – have suffered in cars where the driver is muttering, "I know it is around here somewhere." There is sincere belief; but totally lost.

But here's the thing: we are on the road with the one who knows where he is going. There is going to be one wedding feast. There is one bridegroom, Jesus Christ, and the church will be the bride. The directions to the wedding give one way to get there.

Today is not so much about warning as it is about proclaiming. Jesus *is* the way. Consider the majestic words Paul uses to describe Jesus. This is likely an early hymn of the church:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;
For in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible,
whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through
him and for him.

Do you hear echoes of anything else in that? “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.”

The New Testament writers and the early church were effusive, uninhibited, bubbling over with praise. Their songs were songs of praise. Their exhortations to each other were reminders of awe.

It was the same in the Old Testament. God was more glorious than man could imagine. In the Old Testament, Moses asked to see God’s glory. In Exodus 33 and 34, we read about that adventure:

The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with [Moses] there and proclaimed the name, “the LORD.” The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and fourth generation.”

In verse 29, Moses came down from Mount Sinai and his face shone because he had been talking with God. It was evident in his very being that he had encountered God.

This phenomenon is not so foreign to us. We light up when something good has happened to us. In a so much smaller way, people are sharing reviews of restaurants and shops opening out at the Otay Ranch Mall. If someone only tells you what they have heard; well, you can tell that in their body language. But if they have experienced it themselves, what a difference is their testimony. We look for that light – so much more than the words.

What is your testimony about Jesus? Are you telling from what you have heard of him or can you share from your own experience? For the Scripture writers, they could not contain themselves in boldly sharing their testimony about the goodness of Jesus. How could they do this? They walked with him, they talked with him, they committed themselves to being his disciples, they were willing to be sent out by him to share with others – they could not help but share him with others. How about you?

There is an old story about the bishop going around the construction site supervising the project. He asked each of the laborers what they were doing. “Framing,” said one. “Putting in windows,” said another. Still another was digging. Finally, he came to a man who was laying bricks. The

bishop asked the man what he was doing. Without looking up, the man said, “I am helping build a grand cathedral for the glory of God!”

We are on the road to the coronation of the King, and we are traveling with the one who is first in all things!

We are joined in communion with the Almighty God.

When I was a kid, Christmas was a magical time. The weeks leading up to that morning were filled with anticipation, wonder, yearning, and longing. The excitement was so great that it seemed painful. It seemed like it would never get here. My brother and I would spend hours trying to figure out what the packages meant. It was all we could think about and all we could talk about. We could see that morning in our minds, we could feel it, we could taste it long before it actually arrived. Christmas morning, we were up early; although – truth be told – it wasn’t my fault. My brother would be up at about 4:00 a.m. and he would begin poking me and whispering, “Are you awake?”

Christmas morning would seem so far away, then suddenly upon us. Then, looking back, we could see that the journey was part of the joy.

So it is with the church. What God is doing in the world seems to be taking so long but the ultimate fulfillment will be suddenly upon us. Do you still look forward to Christ’s coming? Are you living in the expectation and longing for that day?

And it will be a better destination than Christmas morning: the promises that Jesus fulfilled tell us that we will be joined in communion with Almighty God.

Look at how Paul describes what God has done in Jesus:

“He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.” Then, “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross.”

Jesus is more than an example. He is more than an illustration. In him is life. In him is reconciliation, in him is forgiveness through his blood shed on the cross. In him is the realization and fulfillment of God’s plans and purposes.

The coronation of the king will be better than any fairytale, any children’s story, and myth that we can create. The celebration will never stop, the joy will be everlasting, the wonder will be more than we can imagine.

Conclusion

Friends, as you go forward from this sanctuary, know that you go as the church dispersed by the Holy Spirit. Go with the charge to invite others to the party to which you have been invited and

welcomed. Go in the confidence that Jesus Christ is King and he is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing. Go with the hope assured that to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forevermore. Amen.

8:45 prayer and offering; 10:00 offering