

Ephesians 3:1-21

Intro

Paul, or someone who is writing for Paul using a variety of his turns of phrases, has just articulated at what we see as the end of chapter 2 that Jesus came and proclaimed 'peace to you who were far off'. To put it into un-coded language, this means anyone who was not Jewish, either by birth or by choice. The Israelites, the Jews, are the people of God's promise. The Old Testament articulates that and reaffirms that in a multitude of ways. Jesus ministry affirms that this relationship is still in place...and then (from our perspective) knocks down the proverbial wall so that the foundation that was already in place might be added on to so that all those who are led to profess their trust in God through him are able to be welcomed as sons and daughters of the living God. It doesn't matter where you live, what you look like, or what you have believed previously: if you believe in Jesus, then you receive the peace of God. This allows all people to become 'citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.'

And then Paul continues (which we will hear momentarily). My question for us to ponder is this: what are we filling ourselves with? The scripture reads this way.

Ephesians 3:1-21

3 This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—²for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given to me for you,³ and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words,⁴ a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ.⁵ In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit:⁶ that is, the Gentiles have become fellow-heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

7 Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the working of his power.⁸ Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ,⁹ and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things;¹⁰ so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.¹¹ This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,¹² in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.¹³ I pray therefore that you may not lose heart over my sufferings for you; they are your glory.

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.¹⁶ 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,¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.¹⁸ I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth,¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

20 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,²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

'Filled with the Fullness (Not Hot Chips)'

On Tuesday morning, the following headline in my news feed caught my attention. It read, 'Hot Cheetos and Takis under fire after snacking teen needs gallbladder removal'.

First off, kudo's to the writer for following up Hot Cheetos with 'under fire' (it's very punny). Now here's the first paragraph: 'A teen regularly ate bags of snacks such as Hot Cheetos and Takis before stomach pains led to a surgery removing her gallbladder. Now her mom wants such snacks put on notice.'

Well, that's...different and ultimately ridiculous, especially when you read the next two paragraphs that talk about how the 17 year old girl was eating 4 bags per week and provides the following quote from the mom. "She loves them. Every time I go out she says, 'Bring me back some Hot Takis, bring me back some Hot Chips.' I want to make her happy, so I brought them back. She was eating big bags and would take them to school with her,"

Alright, so with that information in hand, let me read the headline to you again: 'Hot Cheetos and Takis under fire after snacking teen needs gallbladder removal'.

Really?! Hot chips are to blame here? That's ridiculous. They're chips. They are meant to be sold and consumed...in moderation (they're a sometimes snack people!). What lies at the heart of the problem is a young woman who feels like eating that much junk food makes her feel good, by seemingly make her feel nothing (again, this isn't an 8 year old we're talking about here, this is a 17 year old: she's knows what she was doing isn't healthy), and a mother who just wants to 'make her happy'.

Unfortunately, this story is just an extreme example of a trend and a trap that so many of us fall into, not only in regard to our kids, but ourselves as well: we want it (and please know that I'm talking about way more than food right now), we want it therefore...

But is 'it', whatever 'it' is, filling us in ways that will actually feed us? Or is 'it', whatever 'it' is, just leaving us aching for more...of 'it'?

This past Monday night Jen and I got to see the Mr. Roger's documentary that we talked about in worship two months ago. I know, I know: nothing says date night like going to see a documentary...about Fred Rogers.

But maybe that says more about where we our culture continues to push to, as opposed to whether or not it's a great movie to watch with your spouse.

Because here's the thing: I walked out of that theater feeling like I was able to be reminded of (and in quite a few cases, informed about for the first time) examples of someone who genuinely cared for people, children in particular.

Fred Rogers wasn't trying to create a program so that he was able to cash in and sell as many toys as possible.

Mr. Roger's was instead trying to utilize the most advanced social media tool of his day, the TV, to remind people that the feelings and reactions that children have to the world that happens around them

need to be heard and responded to in ways that care, protect, and empower them to love even as they were being loved; as opposed to just finding ways that keep them quiet or view them as consumers who should have stuff sold to them (because if you have this toy, game, food, number of clicks, then obviously you will feel happy).

Jen and I came out of the story about Mr. Roger's and we said to each other that this is a story that we need to remind each other about on a regular basis so that we don't fall into the rut of 'give 'em what they want' (which is something that I know I struggle with).

Instead, we need to fill each other with what we need.

And clearly, this is a message that is resonating in the American culture as a documentary about a man who died 15 years ago is considered a financial 'hit' as it has sold almost 20 million dollars' worth of tickets in the 40 plus days that it has been out.

In the same breath, the number 1 movie at the box office last week was 'The Equalizer 2' who's synopsis is as follows: 'If you have a problem and there is nowhere else to turn, the mysterious and elusive Equalizer will deliver the vigilante justice you seek.' It earned \$36 million in three days.

Again, what are we filling ourselves with? In terms of what we watch, what we read, what we listen to, what we literally consume, to what we allow ourselves to be enveloped by, what are we filling ourselves with?

What does God want us to fill ourselves with?

As we ponder those questions, let me make clear that I certainly do not think that the world that God wants us to create and consume is some variation of Land of Make Believe. It's make-believe...which means it's not real. We aren't being called to manufacture fake, a land where some variation of cultural Pollyanna is the norm: we are called to love God, neighbor, and self. Until such time as we are in the closer presence of God (aka: heaven...however that Divine mystery ultimately reveals itself), that love exists in the midst of and needs to flow through a world that is not as God created it.

That was one of the wonderful messages that was so abundantly clear as Mr. Roger's spoke to children, cared for children, loved children enough not to give them what they wanted (you know, some fictionalized binky that is intended to pacify as opposed to actual address any real issues (hot chips, anyone?)), but what they needed. He gave kids the opportunity to be filled with God breathed love, even when what they were trying to comprehend that which was anything but love filled (wars, divorce, death, tragedy).

That is what we, as people of faith, are called to partake of, both so that we might be filled by the fullness of God, and so that, ultimately, we too might be able to share that fullness with the world around us. Hear again verses 18 and 19: '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.'

Paul is reminding the Ephesian church, Paul is reminding us, what we need to have ourselves filled by the fullness of God: the love of Christ, which not only allows all of us to be known as daughters and sons of the living God, but empowers us and implores us to share it.

What are you being filled with? Hot chips, regardless of how tasty they may be or how much you may love them, should not be the answer to that question.

Fred Rogers, even back in the 60's looked at the images that were being put out there on TV and was led, not only to say, 'that's not good', but to create a space when love and caring was able to be shown and shared regardless of the difficult realities that were being spoken about (do any of us feel that there is a need for that with the variety of news and entertainment that is consumed today, with the sort of public discourse that has devolved into, 'I'm right, you're wrong, get out because I'm not leaving' ?).

Exactly: we need to bend the conversation so that we are not consuming that mentality...which ultimately means that we are sharing it as well.

The need is great: we can see it in the world and we can recognize it in our own lives. What are you being filled with? Whatever it is, that is ultimately what will be shared with others. 'Know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.'

Seek ways to be filled with the fullness of God. It will be different for each of us, and it is necessary for all of us.

After Sermon Prayer

Holy God, there are many different that we are able to appreciate the fact that what we take in molds and shapes us. There are times when that's for the better...then there are all those other times. Lord, help us to seek You out so that we might be filled with You and Your love: fill us with Your fullness so that we might be able to ever more fully share the reality of Your presence with the world...one person at a time. In Jeus name we do pray. Amen.