

## πληρωμα

Ephesians 1:15-23

November 23, 2014

*The church is Christ's body,*

ΤΟ ΠΛΗΡΩΜΑ ΤΟΥ ΤΑ ΠΑΝΤΑ ΕΝ ΠΑΣΙΝ ΠΛΗΡΟΥΜΕΝΟΥ.

The church is Christ's body. Christ is our head; we are his body. God put all things -- all things! -- under Christ's feet, and then gave him to the church. So Jesus Christ is present ... in the church.

The church is Christ's body. We are the physical presence of Christ in this world. We are his face, his voice, his hands.

Where, if anywhere, will the world see Christ? In us. In the church.

How, if at all, will the world hear Christ speak? From us. From the church.

In what way, if any, will the world be touched by Christ? By us. By the church.

The church is Christ's body. We are Christ's body. It is an extraordinary privilege, and it is an awesome responsibility.

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It makes good sense in Greek! But it is difficult to translate ...

*... the completion of him who himself completes all things everywhere*

*... the fullness of him who fills all in all*

*... filled up by the one who fills all things in every way*

Christ is not merely over all things. Christ fills all things. All things in this world are infused, infiltrated, filled by Christ with the presence and spirit and power of God. Christ is the embodiment of God filling all things and the church is the embodiment of Christ who is the embodiment of God filling all things. It is an extraordinary privilege, and it is an awesome responsibility!

The church is the πληρωμα of Christ: the fullness, the completion, the filling of Christ. The church is πληρωμα ... fullness.

Can you see why this worship series is so important? If the world is to see Christ, the genuine Christ, the church must be full! Sixteen hundred years ago, John Chrysostom said: "If we were not many, the body would not be full."

Our manyness, our diversity, our different ways of thinking and doing and being, are essential to the fullness of the church's embodiment of Christ. Remember what Pope Francis said about the church? He spoke of "the beauty of her varied face."

Our manyness is vital to our witness. But so is our oneness. Christ's body has many parts, but it is one body. When Jesus prayed for all those who would become his followers, he prayed: "May they be one so that the world will know that you sent me."

If we are not one, if the church is divided against itself, or even if the church is merely parceled out into so many separate and unconnected pieces, each doing its own thing without regard for the rest, then the world will not know. The world will not know Christ.

And if we are not one, if we are divided church against church, or if we merely go our own way, do our own thing, mind our own business, without regard for the rest, then we are not the church.

The church is Christ's body. And the church is πληρωμα -- fullness, the fullness of Christ, filled with Christ's presence, being the presence of Christ filling the world. We are members of that body. We are one part of the fullness that is Christ's body. To be what we are, to be what we are meant to be, we must remain connected, we must move in sync with the rest of the body.

That is why the journey of these last ten weeks, immersing ourselves in the worship traditions of our neighbors, is so important. Two weeks ago, I wrote in Tidings about the two outcomes I hope and pray will come from our shared journey, and now at the end of this journey, I will repeat them. Because the end of this journey is really not an ending, but a new beginning!

First, I am hopeful we will have now a better appreciation, and love, for our fellow travelers. We are on the same path, and, more than that, we are parts of the same body. Yes, we do it differently: from the fourteen-page detailed and careful-scripted drama of the divine liturgy of the Greek Orthodox Church to the no bulletin, let the Spirit lead, let it all out, exuberance of pentecostal worship ... from Presbyterians worshipping God with all their mind, to Methodists worshipping God with all their soul, to Lutherans worshipping God with all their heart, to Missionary Baptists worshipping God with all their body.

We do it differently, but we are together an expression of the fullness of Christ who fills all things in every way. We are not competitors, but partners, partners in God's mission. We are not going in different directions. We are fellow travelers walking the same path. We are not different churches, but members of one church, members of one family, members of one body. I pray that we -- members of First Congregational United Church of Christ, you and I -- will acknowledge our brothers, affirm our sisters, appreciate what they are doing and how they are doing it in service to Christ our head, whose fullness is embodied in all of us, through each of us.

And, second, I am hopeful we will learn from them, learn from our brothers and sisters, learn from others walking the same path with us, learn from others who are parts too of Christ's body. We are part of that body, but only a single part. It is when we are joined to the rest of the body, when we move in sync with the rest of the body, when we act as part of the whole, that our worship and our work are filled with the fullness that is Christ -- Christ in us, Christ among us, Christ living through us.

So may we learn from the Jews how to pray and from the Orthodox how to stand in awe in God's presence, from Catholics how to live as servants of Christ and from Presbyterians how to think as servants of Christ, from Lutherans how to rely utterly on God's grace and from Methodists how to strive for nothing less than complete holiness, from Missionary Baptists how to praise God with our whole selves and from Pentecostals how to ask God for what we need, from Baptists how to say "yes" to God when God is calling and from Episcopalians how to revel in the beauty that comes from God and that is God.

If we do, if we do learn something from our neighbors, from our brothers and our sisters, how will things change? What will we do differently? What are the practical implications?

We will have to see ... We will have to see where the journey takes us next. Are you ready to start?