

BE FULL (3d in series on the “Be” Attitude)—Romans 1:20; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Saint marks United Methodist Church, Charleston, WV – 2d Sunday after the Epiphany (January 15) 2017

Romans 1:20 Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse....

1Corinthians 1:3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— ⁶even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— ⁷so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁸who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

(Introduction to book, *The Rock Hole*, by Reavis Z. Wortham:)
“All towns and communities have stories, and are bonded together by the people who live there, those who drop by and only stay for a spell, and who pass through on the way to someplace else.

“All have an impact on those with those whom they have contact. Those stories are collected in memory, and are spun around kitchen tables, in front of the fireplace, on porches and deer camps, or up at the store. Kids flow through these venues without notice, but they are sponges and they absorb stories as they are told. Eventually they grow up and tell stories of their own.”

Paul, the one whom we now call “Saint Paul” came through that extraordinary cosmopolitan city of the Roman empire called Corinth. He was one who dropped by and stayed for awhile. And then he moved on. But sometimes he would write back to them. We have two such “letters” in our Bible (which some Bible scholars believe were actually a compilation of FIVE letters.)

He wrote back to try to deal with problems they faced. He wrote back to encourage them. He wrote to sometimes “correct” them, and “exhort” them – to carry on the good work that was begun within them. I was taught, when I studied these scriptures, that the recipient of the letter would gather people together in their home (and churches met in homes back then) and someone would read the letter from their “father in Christ, Paul, the tent maker.” And then they would discuss it; analyze it; and

(as we have learned from history) they took to heart his message. The message of the Grace of God through Jesus Christ was more than just words, more than just a story.

These were words of power, for which the followers would – over the course of time – be so inspired as to stand up to the mightiest government known to them and to die for their faith.

These were words of power, by which the followers (in the words of Acts 17:6 quotation of the pagans) “**turned the world upside down.**”

And these people – so encouraged – lived UP TO THEIR POTENTIAL. They didn’t play down to the lowest common denominator.

They did not pander to the fears of people.

They did not stir up hatred and animosity toward others.

Instead they did what they did because of LOVE.

They did what they did because of the Gospel of Grace and of Reconciliation.

They did what they did to make it so that the message from this wandering tent maker would find its way to us in Charleston, West Virginia.

They did this because they **BELIEVED** ... believed what Paul told them: **YOU HAVE BEEN ENRICHED IN JESUS, IN SPEECH AND KNOWLEDGE OF EVERY KIND. ... YOU ARE NOT LACKING IN ANY SPIRITUAL GIFT.**

They operated out of a **SPIRIT and BELIEF of FULLNESS.**

Not out of a spirit of scarcity.

I wonder if anyone heard the story of that little boy from Corinth, whose name was Rufus. Rufus was the 13 year old son of **Achaicus** and **Lydia**. Rufus was baptized into the Grace of God when his parents accepted and believed the good news they heard from Paul. Rufus received a new name in his baptism – the name given to all Christians in their baptism: “beloved child of God, precious and beautiful to behold.”

And Rufus was around to see his parents become leaders, along with Stephanas and Fortunatas, and others, in spreading the good news of this blessing.

Rufus saw people come into his parents' house, so excited about what they heard, and what it meant in their lives. By the time Rufus was a man, his father had already gone on the road from Corinth to join up with Paul in this ministry – too excited about this good news; too full of the blessing of **BEING ENRICHED IN JESUS, IN SPEECH AND KNOWLEDGE OF EVERY KIND. ... KNOWING THAT THEY DID NOT LACK ANY SPIRITUAL GIFT.**

Rufus grew up, in a special time and place, for he saw so many people that were friends of his parents living out of a **SPIRIT and BELIEF of FULLNESS.**

Rufus collected all these stories in his memory -- stories spun around kitchen tables, in front of the fireplace, on porches and deer camps, or up at the store. Rufus and his childhood friends were all around in these venues without notice, but they were sponges and they absorbed stories they heard. Eventually they grew up and told stories of their own

And the following are NOT the stories that Rufus and his childhood and teenage friends heard:

- I would love to reach out and tell people about what Jesus means to me ... but I can't get a round tuit until I raise my children. My family comes first.
- I will get a round tuit to going down to help in the Friday night ministries, when I get this assignment at work behind me. I need some more time.
- I will get a round tuit to grow into tithing when I get some of these bills paid and I have more disposable income. Things are just too tight right now. You can't get blood out of a turnip. I have to take care of more important stuff first.
- I will get a round tuit and come to Sunday School, or to a Monday night class, or participate in the Altar Guild, or sing in the choir, when I am [fill in the blank with whatever round tuit you choose.]

While I continue the sermon, the Ushers have something to give you. Ushers, please come and pass out the offering plates so that everyone can receive this – one to a customer, please – while I continue the sermon.

Rufus never heard the people in his family or in his church family say ANYthing like this BECAUSE they believed what Paul told them: that they were ALREADY FULL of all that they needed to do what God called them to do.

BEING FULL, i.e. BEING ENRICHED IN JESUS, IN SPEECH AND KNOWLEDGE OF EVERY KIND. ... KNOWING THAT THEY DID NOT LACK ANY SPIRITUAL GIFT was not a future hope. It was NOW.

And the thing that Rufus saw from his parents and his parents' friends was that they believed that this FULLNESS would never be empty. It was like the song that children sometime sing:

Love is something if you give it away,
 Give it away, give it away.
 Love is something if you give it away,
 You end up having more.
 It's just like a magic penny,
 Hold it tight and you won't have any.
 Lend it, spend it, and you'll have so many
 They'll roll all over the floor.

Rufus grew up in a special time, indeed. He lived in a time when people “OF THE WAY” (we call them “CHRISTIANS” today) believed what the tent maker preacher wrote them:

the grace of God was given you in Christ Jesus, so that in EVERY WAY you were enriched in him in ALL speech and ALL knowledge...so that you are NOT LACKING IN ANY GIFT, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁸ who will sustain you to the end

And Rufus *not only heard* the adults read that letter from the tent make preacher that said that – he also *SAW that message being lived out* by the adults in his life.

Rufus is not here today ... He went on and did a great many things in the FULLNESS OF THE SPIRIT that he also received. It's just like Jesus said in the Be-

attitudes: **Blessed are the merciful, for they will obtain mercy.** In the economy of the Kingdom of Heaven, **giving results in refilling.**

- Living life in the fullness of the Spirit fills the tank up.
- Emptying it out is quite impossible. Pouring Out simply results in Being filled.

And still some people who think that they are Christians say they will get a round tuit someday.

As the introduction to that book, that I began this sermon with, says:

"All towns and communities have stories, and are bonded together by the people who live there, those who drop by and only stay for a spell, and who pass through on the way to someplace else.

"All have an impact on those with those whom they have contact. Those stories are collected in memory, and are spun around kitchen tables, in front of the fireplace, on porches and deer camps, or up at the store. Kids flow through these venues without notice, but they are sponges and they absorb stories as they are told. Eventually they grow up and tell stories of their own."

I hope that the children collecting stories here – in this place – receive a legacy of more than just round tuits. I know that I did, as a child. Like Rufus, I saw people who believed the Gospel enough to live it fully. I was blessed to not seeing them simply relying upon round tuits.

The ushers passed out to you, during the sermon today, a genuine round tuit. **The next time God nudges you to pour out some of the FULLNESS which is ALREADY yours. think about what you want the children to see.**

You can choose to pull out and use your round tuit – denying the Word of God that you have already been blessed with all you need to do what God calls you to do. [repeat that phrase: denying the Word of God that you have already been blessed with all you need to do what God calls you to do.] OR you can choose to BELIEVE in the Gospel, like what Rufus saw.

Pinch and you will live a pinched life. OR Believe in God's Gift of FULL BLESSING, and experience just how much MORE God has available for you.

Jesus never forces you. You get to choose. And you get to reap what you sew.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.