

BONDAGE TO SHRINKING OR DRINKING

Acts 2:1-29 and Ephesians 5:15-21

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. Well, here we are, sort of at ground zero for the Holy Spirit's introduction into our understood world. Of course He has been present from the beginning, hovering over the water at creation, present at Jesus' baptism, and active throughout salvation history — but in our Acts text today we see the Holy Spirit enter powerfully on a mighty rushing wind, filling the entire house as tongues of fire rested on each of the participants' heads, causing them to speak fluently in numerous languages.

After hearing the Holy Spirit wind, people gathered from all over the place and were amazed at the miraculous words being spoken at one of the first Christian worship services ever. And what was the response of the onlookers? "Well, they must be drunk." What a lame explanation for supernatural divine intervention in their lives. "They must have had too much cheap wine." I'm sorry, but what? That makes no sense. And Peter's response that it's only 9am so they couldn't be drunk suggests to me that he never had the misfortune of spending a weekend in Wisconsin. Of all of the things to say about the apostles and this crazy experience, why would they accuse them of being day drunk? And what about the Holy Spirit seems to be connected with drunkenness? Later we see Paul make the same connection and correction in his writing to the Ephesians: "Don't get drunk on wine, but be filled with the Spirit." So why are those two things showing up side by side?

If you're just joining us this morning, we've been having a wonderful weekend studying the Holy Spirit together with Pastor Hector Franco. We've explored the person and work of the Holy Spirit that is living and active in every believer. We've also studied and prayed for the fruit He produces in each of us as evidence of His redemptive work. But in today's texts we see a comparison being made between the Holy Spirit and drunkenness that would certainly not show up on any Mount Carmel brochures. And so what do the impacts of the Holy Spirit and the impact of drunkenness have in common, and why do they show up side by side multiple times in Scripture?

Well, both change people in obvious ways. Both change people enough that it can be jarring to those who used to know the old "normal version" of you. But the mechanism and the cause of the change couldn't be more opposite. Drunkenness creates counterfeit freedom. It creates counterfeit control. As a chemical depressant, it accomplishes this by making the world smaller. Only it doesn't — it just makes you *feel* like it's smaller. Drunkenness shrinks the world to a size that you can control, you can manage. Your inhibitions blur, things far off become blurry, your fears fade away into the distance until you can't make out why those things off in the distance used to bother you so much. The only problem is drunkenness does nothing but give you the false sense of freedom, the false sense that all those things are true. And while we are certainly talking about drunkenness in the plain sense, it's certainly not just alcohol that we abuse to attempt to shrink the world around us. It's certainly not just alcohol that we use to numb the fears and far-off anxieties and obsessions that we're battling. You can pick from social media, workaholism, perfectionism, or whatever

obsession du jour. These things can all accomplish the numbing the old Adam or the old Eve is after.

The Spirit does the opposite: He makes everything bigger. Just the smallest brush with the Creator of the universe makes us realize that God's holiness, mercy, and power are so inescapably large that you not only forget yourself in the midst of God's glory, but the things you used to fear become inconsequential. Not lowered inhibitions, or loss of self-consciousness — but a drowning out of those little problems with the infinite power, majesty, and glory of God.

The contrast is plain as day at Mount Carmel. Turn to the numbing seven-inch box in your pocket, full of mindless entertainment, meant to make you feel big and strong and smart, making you feel in control, skipping ads and deciding everything — or stand at the edge of the lake watching the stars move across the sky, feeling small in the best of ways.

The unfortunate reality is that we are so often people who choose the box in our pocket. Paul's word for what wine does means more literally "dissipation" — wastefulness, scattering into the wind, emptiness. It's from the same word family Luke uses for the prodigal son's reckless, wasteful living. Now, few of us are drunkards, at least publicly. Maybe we're not all drinkers. But we are all shrinkers. We're all people who like to make the world smaller and feel in control. We pack the schedule so full, the social media feed is so consuming, that nothing bigger than that has space in our day. We manage to make life smaller, and that small life becomes busy enough that we no longer allow ourselves to worry about being filled. Verse 16 of our Ephesians text today says "the days [lived that way] are evil." Because

while we may feel in control, or that we're shrinking the world around us we're wasting away day after day just keeping up with the rat race, until all of a sudden you realize months have gone by without much meaning or impact at all. We feel like we have no time for anything, but we give it away like it's worthless. We feel like we have no time for anything but we hand over days like they're unlimited.

We have a lot of college students here serving on Summer Staff. I know family life is crazy and keeping kids alive is an insane undertaking most days of the week, but I'll never forget how crazy college was for me. Taking lessons on several instruments, going to studio rehearsals, playing in numerous music ensembles, all the while switching my major over and over again and taking an overload of classes pretty much every semester to stay on track. It was kind of miserable... And I remember one of my close friends, on one of the nights where we had managed to carve out thirty minutes to eat supper together, looking down at his plate of cafeteria food and very honestly acknowledging out loud: "I won't remember today." If that's not a direct condemnation of the lifestyle we were living, I don't know what is. We were wasting the days away. Giving them away, really. Shrinking our world around us to whatever topic we were studying or piece we were spending hours a day perfecting in the practice room. And I suspect you have a version of this in your own life too.

Whether it's your work, your reputation, your car, your finances, your career, your piety, or your instant gratification — you are a world shrinker. Stop wasting your life! Stop wasting it through your attempts to control and please God with piety; stop wasting

it through mind-numbing activities. Do not waste away! Paul exhorts us in our text today to stop stumbling drunkenly through our days, wasting the precious life Christ has poured out for you. On the cross Christ paid for all of your sleepy sins — you are forgiven. Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you!

Even while we slumber, run the rat race, and sell ourselves for shrunken worlds — notice who buys us back time and time again. Galatians 4 tells us God sent forth his Son to *redeem* — even wasted days. The same word used for "making the most of" in our Ephesians text today. It appears also in Galatians 3:13 — "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law" — and in Colossians 4:5, where we're told to walk in wisdom, "redeeming the time." Christ buys you back. Wasted days, drunken illusion of a shrunken world and all — at the price of his expensive and precious blood on the cross. In Acts 2:33 Peter explains that the Holy Spirit poured out at Pentecost comes from Christ — crucified, died, and risen *for you* — who "has poured out what you now see and hear." The Holy Spirit at Pentecost was poured out because Christ was poured out — completely emptied on the cross for you — so that empty people, wasting away their days, shrinking their worlds, and watching their days rush by, could be stopped. That a new thing could happen, and that people like you and I could be filled. Filled to the brim and overfilled with abundant life, rivers of living water.

And the amazing truth about being filled by the Holy Spirit is that the verb here in verse 18 is passive. The only way to obey it is to receive. You're just a broken vessel being poured into. Just receive.

My prayer and hope for everyone that comes to Mount Carmel, whether it be for a Sunday worship service or a family camp, is that they can hear God's Word and be refilled with the Holy Spirit while they're here. Not in the sense that you come here to get your spiritual high or feel euphoria while you're here. That won't go with you when you leave. So what do you bring with you when you climb in the minivan to leave this place?

Colossians 3:16 is sort of a twin passage to Ephesians 5. We're called in Colossians to "let the word of Christ dwell in us richly" — with the same singing results from Ephesians. Filled by the Holy Spirit through God's Word. And the frankly amazing thing is that the Holy Spirit doesn't play hide-and-seek. He binds himself to God's Word and to normal things like water and communion elements. He binds himself to where he promises to be found: in God's Word and in the physical, earthy ways he promises to connect with you. Being filled with the Spirit isn't just when visions, winds, and fire appear. It is those things, but it is also participating in Christian community. It's happening when we're singing today in worship and building one another up. We've been participating in the command of the text all weekend together here at camp, whether or not we were even aware of it.

Now, it'd be easy to read our Ephesians text today as a homework assignment. One more thing to add into your busy schedule that keeps you from noticing your need for God's grace. But for once the Greek grammar rules help us today. "Singing, thanking, and submitting" in this passage are not three new commands. They're participles — they hang off of the verb "be filled," meaning they work as descriptions of the verb "be

filled." Filled people then do these things: singing, thanking God, and submitting to one another. We worship a God both of the extraordinary and of the ordinary. And the fruit of the Spirit in us can look as simple as singing together on the way home — probably badly, for most of us. Giving thanks can look like the normal table prayer on a random Tuesday night. Submitting to one another might be as simple as allowing a brother or sister to use the bathroom first on a Monday morning.

I get it, the crazy fire from heaven moments are cool and awesome. But the majority of your life is spent in the ordinary and what some might call mundane! But it's not boring to see the Holy Spirit in the mundane. God redeems every little "boring moment" and makes it matter! When we see the holy spirit in the mundane we realize that nothing in God's creation can be written off. And that the relationships and things we've been given aren't just a means to an end. When you realize that God accomplishes amazing things through normal people like you and I, we're no longer able to ignore the people around us. When you realize God works through the ordinary you're compelled and drawn to value the people you interact with. And your love for your neighbor is contagious! The good kind of contagious!

I used to run Cross Country in high school. I loved it. It was a simple sport but it was a hard sport, it was simple because all you have to do is run. It was hard because all you have to do is run. But we would run hundreds and hundreds of miles all spring and all summer to then run 8 3 miles races in the fall. And those races were a ton of fun don't get me wrong, and the crazy moments in life are amazing! But the thing I loved most about

being on that team were the normal everyday miles run together in community running side by side and taking joy in the conversations and the ability to get to run together.

In college I figured the next step was to start doing marathons and one of the marathons I did was Grandma's marathon in Duluth. It's a cool race and a cool run by Lake Superior, but probably the worst part of it is that you can see the Duluth lift bridge the finish line from about 7 miles into the 26.2 mile run. And so for almost 20 miles all you can focus on is how far away that finish line is. It makes the ordinary trees and the sweaty people around you kind of just an inconvenience to be endured until you get to that far off goal.

When we see God in the ordinary we no longer have to ignore the blessings around us for some far off goal. We no longer have to just tolerate the pain of being with people and wait until we die to get to that heavenly finish line. The Holy Spirit breathes life abundant life into the ordinary in every moment of your day. Because Christ died for you and took your Sins to the Cross your relationship with God the father almighty creator of heaven and earth is in every beautiful and challenging moment of every day.

God the Father knit you together in your mother's womb, Christ laid down his life so that you could have life and have it abundantly, and the Holy Spirit fills you today with new life, so that day by day you might live out your baptismal identity as a "New Creation" — a New Thing. In the ordinary and in the extraordinary. And maybe that's the greatest miracle of all, that the omnipotent, creator of the universe, and all powerful God chooses to dwell in you. He dwells in you so that you never have

to say "I won't remember today". He remembers you so that you can remember today. He Chooses to relish and celebrate in the tuesday night supper prayers and in the road trip sing alongs. Because of his Great love for you. His beloved child he is present with you in the ordinary and in the extraordinary. And even when we stumble and fall back into our wasteful shrinking behavior the Abundant Life lived as a beloved Child of God is full of Grace. Grace at the foot of the cross day by day. Grounded in the Forgiveness and Grace of Jesus Christ for you.

This same imperative-and-participle Greek turn of phrase is probably most famous in Matthew 28:19: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." "Make disciples" is the only command verb in that passage. So a more truthful translation of the Great Commission might be "*as you go on your way, make disciples.*" As you go on your way, relish the joy of every moment being filled by the Holy Spirit with life. So as you leave today, into your vehicles and into normal life, please receive this blessing:

["As You Go on Your Way" sending blessing, sung by the full Summer Staff:]

"As you go on your way, may Christ go with you. May he go before you to show you the way; may he go behind you to encourage you; beside you to befriend you; above you to watch over; within you to give you peace." In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.