

A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church  
**"Satisfied with Christ's Power and Gift"**

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Colossians 2:9-10  
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The New Testament book of Colossians is a little letter with a big message; a message big enough to change everything, our understanding, our lives, and the whole world.

Colossians 2:9, "In Christ, the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." Not just the fullness of deity dwells in Christ. To be sure we get the point, "The whole fullness," not just some of the fullness, or part of the fullness, but the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily in Christ.

This, of course, is quite a claim. Deity is that which is sacred, holy and immortal. One of the major themes of the Old Testament, perhaps the most central claim is that there are no multiple deities, or that everything is deity. Rather, there is one God. God is One. The classic Jewish confession of faith: "Hear O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is One." In the movie Rudy, the wise old priest answers Rudy's near-impossible quest with, "I know there's a God and I know that I'm not him." That pretty well sums up the message of the Old Testament. There is a God. You are not him. And neither is anything around you.

Even the creation story from Genesis 1 makes this point. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." And the story moves through 6 days of the creation by God of the sun, moon, stars, the water, the land, the animals and you and me. Now, this was in direct contrast with the beliefs of the neighbors of Israel who believed that the sun was a god, and so were the moon and the stars. The force that made it rain was a deity; so was the force that made the wind blow. For some people, a particular animal was divine and worshipped. The idea of a powerful, unseen sacred force, the deity, was dispersed into all of these entities: sun, moon, stars, wind and rain. Each required respect and appeasement for life to function well. If you are a farmer and you want your crops to grow, appease the rain god and sun god so they will be happy with you and send the sun and rain in right measure. If you live near a major river, appease the god of the river so it will flow but stay in its banks.

In the midst of cultures all around them that identified the seen things with unseen divine forces, Israel's understanding of the world was different. In the beginning, God created the sun, moon, stars, plants and animals, rain and wind. And these all fall under God's dominion and reign. These, like us, are all part of the created order, named as good by God, but not named as gods by us. There is one God in whom the authority, and power, and dominion over all of creation rests.

This God is a powerful God, but also a loving God. He is no tame lion, per C. S. Lewis, but God wants what is best for all of creation. God has an unswerving desire for justice to be done and as we heard from Amos and other prophets last week, God's thundering, corrective justice can be painful. The one thing God seemingly won't do is circumvent our free will. We are free to respond to God, to love Him in return, to live by His will, and share our lives in His. We are free to love God or turn our backs on Him. But when we don't, when we turn our faces toward God and open our lives to Him, we are transformed into

God's image. One Christian (Niketas) who was known for both being insightful and optimistic reflected on the change in us this way:

*Once a soul has been consumed*

*In the depths of God's love*

*And has tasted the sweet delight*

*Of God's graces, it can no longer bear to stay frozen in its former condition*

*But is impelled to rise ever higher to the heavens.*

*- Niketas Stethatos*

"I know the plans for you," God declares through Jeremiah, "plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. When you seek Me with all your heart, I will be found by you."

Then along comes Jesus, and then the New Testament, which is trying to make sense of Jesus. And it comes with this claim: Colossians 2:9, "In Christ, the whole fullness of the deity dwells bodily." The power of the sacred, the holy, the divine; the power to make the wind blow, and the rain to fall; the power to quiet storms and give comfort; the power to heal and bring life from death, once thought to be dissipated in all manner of the created order, now gathered in One God, is now poured, wholly, completely into One Man. Most likely, this would have made more sense to us if that One Man was a conquering hero whose dominion and authority over the earth was evident through his conquests and victories, and submission of other kings to Him. It is in our nature to look for evidence of power in the ways power is usually used.

But, according to the New Testament, God, instead of dwelling bodily in a king of Rome or any other nation, came as a carpenter's son in a region of Galilee. That's not to say that the man sitting on the throne of Rome didn't claim this honor for himself. The Romans, like the Greeks before them, believed in a dissipated deity. There were lots of gods, who had divine powers. You've heard their names: Apollo, Venus, Athena, Jupiter. The king of Rome, the Caesar, claimed that their powers dwelt in him. "Caesar is Lord," the Romans shouted (on threat of death of course). "Jesus is Lord," the Christians subversively whispered, risking their lives for their faith.

"In Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." It's hard to imagine all of the unimaginable power of deity dwelling in one person, and that person not using it. Sure, Christ walked on water, and healed some people of leprosy, and turned some bread and fish into a feast for thousands; but then He let them beat Him and torture Him, and even kill Him. Tempted as He might have been to call down 10,000 angels in His defense, desiring as He might have been to count His equality with God something to be grasped, He humbled Himself, lowered Himself not just to being a man, but to death, even death on a cross.

We humans encountered the power that created the universe, we marveled at it. It didn't look like we thought it should look. It was meek, gentle and kind, and tender to the vulnerable, and then we couldn't take it anymore.

But the New Testament isn't done with all of this. Relentlessly hopeful and counter-intuitive, the New Testament goes on to say in Colossians 2:10, "you have been filled in Him." We are filled in Christ. We are filled by the One who emptied Himself.

This is a spiritual journey to the truth and depths of who we are made to be as redeemed creatures of God. That journey does not always proceed easily, upward and onward. We live in a world that has lost its way on this journey and I myself have lost my way many times.

There is a great gulf between the ways the world and my ego want to identify me and who I am when I am filled by Christ. The farther and deeper you go into the journey into Christ, and Christ into you, the more clear this becomes; and, often the more painful. We seek to be filled, satiated, on the things of this world, but our fullness is in Christ. As Parker Palmer discovered and shared, running beneath the surface of what we call our lives is the deeper and truer life wanting to be acknowledged. And more than acknowledged, set free. Thomas Merton calls it "True Self." Quakers call it the "inner light or 'that of God' within every person." You'll see it in business ethics class as integrity, and in sociology as identity. Biblical faith calls it the "image of God," in which we are all created. (adapted from Parker Palmer, *Let your Life Speak*)

This journey to experiencing the fullness of Christ is a journey of self-emptying. John the Baptist was ready for this, "I must decrease that He may increase." Augustine noticed it as well, "my soul does not rest until it rests in you." The poet, Tennyson, "O for a man to arise in me, that the man I am may cease to be." In contrast to all the other things in the world we turn to, to fill us up, Christ says, "The thief comes only to steal and destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it to the full."

How easy would it be if the Christian journey were just as simple as pulling into the Jesus Christ full-service filling station when we get empty, and say, "Fill 'er up." My tank is empty, and I need some Holy Spirit gasoline to keep me trucking along." (I think there's a sermon preparation song in there somewhere.) But it's not that easy. At least it's not for me.

What I find is that I'm not merely a hollow vessel just waiting to be filled, it's that while I might feel empty, I'm actually so full of stuff, that there's little room for the sacred goodness that would actually fill me. The work to create space in me for Christ is painful work. It's like my heart has to be chiseled away, bit by bit. My false self, a complex coupling of competing captivities with its ego and insecurities, its self-righteousness and shame; its submission to influences and isolated loneliness, these things are like rock-solid plaque in my spiritual arteries.

It's not that I'm ready to be filled by Jesus. I'm not. I'm a shallow, distracted, neurotic, selfish person who needs grace and a lifetime of spiritual disciplines to chisel away all the stuff that's not Jesus in my life, to make more room for Him in me. "O for a man to arise in me, that the man I am may cease to be." This man arising in me, slowly, painfully, is Christ. What we find is that when we are on the way to being filled wholly by the fullness of Christ, we are on the way to being most who we are each created to be. This journey toward God is a journey toward ourselves, in the deepest sort of wonderful irony. In God we lose ourselves and we find ourselves. Merton said, "To know God is to know ourselves fully, and to know ourselves fully is to know God." I am fully myself, the way the One True God created me to be when I am filled by Christ. That's the journey of life.

All the other stuff I turn to, to fill me will only leave me emptier. They are empty calories. They will not satisfy the deep inner longing we were born with a need to fill. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." Christ

will fill the deepest hunger for life. We are filled in Christ when we empty ourselves. We live in Christ when we die to ourselves. We are raised with Christ, when we are buried with Him. We lose ourselves and find ourselves in Him.

This is the power of baptism, the dying and rising; and the power of the supper, the emptying and filling, the power of baptism and the supper, and every gift we have been given is Christ's power and gift.