

Rev. Janet Doyle
Elmer Presbyterian Church
5th Sunday after Pentecost
July 10, 2022
Scripture: Acts 7:51-60

Sermon: Filled to Overflow

There is a new contemporary Christian song by Andrew Ripp called, "Fill My Cup." It reminds me of the verse in Psalm 23 that says, "My cup overflows with blessings."

Some of the lyrics to Andrew Ripp's song say, "I've been looking for the river that could fill my soul. Been walkin' to a city I cannot see. Fill my cup, Lord, Run it over. Give me love, give me joy, give me peace. Fill my cup, Lord, run it over, I am your child in need. Lord, I need you. Fill my house up with hoping, fill my plans up with purpose, fill my rooms up with healing. Lord, I need you to fill my cup. Fill my days up with meaning, Fill my future up with vision, goodness, grace and provision. Lord, I need you to fill my cup. Fill my cup, Lord. Run it over. I am your child in need."

It is a great song and you can hear it on 106.9 KLOVE on the radio or look it up on youtube.

It isn't just about the Lord filling you up but filling you up so that you are overflowing with blessings and it pours out upon others that you meet.

We have been talking about the filling of the Holy Spirit since Pentecost Sunday and the gift that the Holy Spirit is to us. When the Holy Spirit came that first Pentecost Day the disciples and followers of Jesus were all filled with the Holy Spirit to serve in his name.

We also want to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to be his witnesses. That is why we are here right? We want to learn and grow as his disciples and to make a difference wherever we can whether it is around the world or in your hometown. We want to be filled to overflow.

We are looking at scripture this morning that has to do with Stephen, a man filled with the Holy Spirit; he was filled to overflow. Stephen was the first martyr of the Christian church. Stephen died a very horrible death, by stoning, and Saul was standing there with approval. Saul, who God called and soon became Paul, the great evangelist. But that day of Stephen's stoning he was condoning the actions of the people.

Stephen was a newly appointed Deacon in the church, ready to help others. The Greek word *diakonos* was the root word from which we get the word "Deacon." Stephen was "***one who served by example.***" He was elected along with six other people

to administer the daily distribution among the poor widows in the Jerusalem church. The scripture tells us that Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit and full of faith.

Stephen allowed the Holy Spirit to guide him, and his actions reflected the power of the Holy Spirit. Stephen's faith ran deep and it showed in his actions and the way he lived his life. Stephen was able to be filled because he had confessed all his sins and God washed them away and cleansed Stephen for new life in him. Stephen had experienced saving grace.

Ephesians 2:8 says, "For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." God doesn't want to fill a dirty vessel—it must be a clean vessel.

Stephen had just preached a message to the Jewish leaders. Stephen's message, that day, had to do with others' self-worship and not God-worship. People were rejoicing in the work of their own hands not in the work of God. Stephen began to do great wonders. The leaders instigated some others to raise charges of heresy against Stephen and he soon found himself standing before the high-priest in order to defend his words and actions.

Stephen's speech contained remembrances of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and the prophets. Stephen perfectly told the story of the Old Testament to the high priest. Stephen committed no blasphemy in his speech. Some of his final words were, ***"You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in hearts and ears, you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to. Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers. You are the ones that have received the law as ordained by angels, and yet you have not kept it."***

The council was enraged and wanted Stephen out of the way. They argued that he had spoken against Moses and God and against this holy place and law. After raising up false witnesses, they twisted the words of Stephen and accused him of similar charges as they did Jesus.

While they began to torment him he looked up and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing along the right side, and he declared this triumphantly to the people.

Jesus is there with Stephen at the final moments of his life, and how fitting, considering the fact that Stephen utters the same words that Christ did at his own death.

While the stones were flying through the air, Stephen's prayer was not for deliverance, but a declaration of trust and of freedom in knowing Jesus as his Savior. Stephen was "filled to overflow." Stephen didn't cry out, **"Lord, save me!"** but

“Lord, receive my spirit” just as Jesus did. His prayer is one that looks forward, not backward. His prayer was for his enemies, and not himself.

Verse 55 says, **“Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.”**

Death at that moment is stripped of its power and the door of heaven is opened and reveals the glory of God. Death is not to be feared but instead it shows Jesus standing to receive us. When we believe in Jesus and his resurrection he makes death a door into the glory of God and to Jesus, and when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we are comforted and at peace.

Stephen’s final words were, **“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”** When Jesus was dying he had said, **“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”** (Luke 23:34)

Again, being filled with the Holy Spirit the power of death is destroyed and Stephen shows his Christlikeness in the hour of his death. What was meant again for despair and hopelessness brought victory and eternal life. Many in the world are still willing to give their lives to Jesus and at a cost just like Stephen.

In the magazine, ***Voice of the Martyrs***, there was a story about a young man that reminds me of Stephen and his commitment to serving the Lord at all costs. His name is John Chau. As a teenager, John sensed God calling him to take the gospel to the people of North Sentinel Island, which is in the Bay of Bengal, southeast of India. For nine years, he prepared himself to go to the island, live among the people, learn their language and share Christ with them. John knew the risks. He knew the Sentinelese had been violent toward visitors before, but he also knew God had called him to go.

“I believe that the measure of success in the kingdom of God is obedience,” John said shortly before his death. **“I want my life to reflect obedience to Christ and to live in obedience to Him. I think that Jesus is worth it. He’s worth everything,”**

John made several attempts to communicate with the people on the island but each attempt he was met with attacks from the people. On November 16, 2018 John went ashore to the island for the last time. When the fisherman that took him returned the next day, they saw a dead person being buried at the shore which looked like John’s body. Nothing is known about what happened between John’s arrival on the beach and his death.

In John’s journal is a written challenge for others to remain faithful to Christ. He wrote, **“I pray you will never love anything in this world more than you love Christ.”**

John lived up to that challenge. John follows in the footsteps of faithful Christians throughout history, beginning with the martyrdom of all but one of the original 12 disciples.

In the 1800's only one in four missionaries survived his or her first term in the Congo. In 1866, Robert Thomas died on a riverbank in Korea trying to take the gospel to Korea. Five men were speared to death in 1956 while trying to share the love of Christ with an unreached tribe in the Ecuadorian jungle. On March 18, 2004 Warren and Donna Pett were shot and killed in Uganda by Muslim extremists. A willingness to "die trying" has always been a requirement for taking the gospel to places it's never been heard.

John wrote in his journal, ***"Whoever comes after me, please give them a double anointing and bless them mightily."***

May we follow the example of Stephen and of John Chau and all the others that stand strong in their faith and are filled with the Holy Spirit and overflowing with the love of God to those around them wherever they are in the world.

Not all of us can be Stephens, but we can all be Christians filled to overflow into this world that needs living water. We can speak the truth of what God has done for us in our lives.

May we reclaim our commitment to changing the world for the kingdom of God one person at a time.

Tertullian, the great church father of 200 AD said, ***"Kill us, torture us, condemn us, grind us into dust.. The more you mow us down, the more we grow, the seed is the blood of Christians."***

God really does fill us to overflow and he uses us for his glory and all things do work together for the good. God will always carry out the best plan to bring about his purposes and he will always use all things to his glory and honor.

Stephen's death led to the evangelization of Judah and Samaria and many other areas.

God is good all the time, and all the time God is good.

This is the day to ask God to fill you to overflowing so that the blessings keep flowing in you and through you and overflow on to others around you.

Remember the words to Andrew Ripp's song "Fill My Cup"?

"Fill my cup, Lord. Run it over. Give me love, give me joy, give me peace. Fill my cup, Lord. Run it over, I am your child in need. Fill my house up with hoping. Fill my plans up with purpose. Fill my rooms up with healing. Lord, I need you. Fill my days up with meaning. Fill

my future with vision, goodness, grace and provision. Fill my cup,
Lord. Run it over.” Amen.