

## Imagine the People of God - Fruition: *Ephesians 1:15-23*

Norwalk Christian Church, November 22, 2015, Proper 29, Year B, Imagine the People of God Series

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My favorite preacher, Barbara Brown Taylor, tells in one of her sermons about an interview she read with the novelist Reynolds Price. In the interview, Price, who is a Christian, is asked why he doesn't not attend a church. "Part of it, he says, is a disillusionment dating from the civil rights era, when the white southern Christian church, he says, 'behaved about as badly as possible.' But that is not the only reason. 'The few times I've gone to church in recent years,' he says, 'I'm immediately asked if I'll coach the Little League team, or give a talk on Wednesday night, or come to the men's bell-ringing class on Sunday afternoon. Church has become a full-service entertainment facility.'"

"It ought to be the place where God lives."<sup>1</sup>

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Over the last three weeks, we've been "Imagining the People of God". We've talked about Imagination, Transformation and, this week, a strange word, "Fruition". In some ways, you could track our journey to that of planting a garden. Before you ever begin the garden, you must first imagine it. Where will you plant it? What will you plant? Will it receive enough sun? Enough rain? Shelter from the wind? First you must imagine the garden.

And then, the work of transformation begins. You till the soil. You pull the weeds. You plant the seeds in neat little rows. You water. You return, pulling more weeds, keeping the rabbits away. You work and work, until the soil begins to transform, the seeds become plants, and the plants produce fruit.

And then, the harvest season comes. The garden is done. The seed has come to fruition, and it's time to eat what you have grown.

This is how it is when we imagine the people of God. There are times we sit and imagine what we could be. Imagine what we should do. Dream of new ministries, new ways of being disciples together. But then, we move to transformation. We begin to change ourselves. We become better people. We lay off things that hold us back, and develop new habits and practices that transform us into Christ. But we can't stop there. Then, the church must get busy. We start producing fruit, we become what we had imagined, and through our transformation, the world is changed because of God's fruit in our lives.

From imagination, to transformation to fruition. This is our full life as Church.

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As we've taken this three week journey, we've bounced all over Ephesians, and today, we are right in the beginning of the book, which begins with a prayer. And it's some prayer!

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, Home By Another Way, "He Who Fills All in All", Pg. 139.

The writer prays that our eyes be opened, enlightened, so that we can see what is behind the curtain of the physical world, peer through the keyhole of time, and see the immeasurable greatness of God's power at work in the world, but not just in the world, this power is at work in us.

God put this same immeasurably great power at work in Christ, we are told, when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places. And God has put all things under Christ's feet, making him the head over all things for the church, which is his body. And what is Christ's body? The church is Christ's body, and we are the fullness of Jesus, who fills all in all.

God fills up Christ with his power. And Christ fills us up with his power. And we make the world full with Christ's power.

Or as my favorite preacher, Barbara Brown Taylor imagines it, it's a lot like a four-tiered fountain, in which God's glory is at the top, and it flows out, spilling over into Jesus, and Jesus' glory flows out, spilling over into the church, and the church's glory flows out, spilling over and drenching the whole universe.

In other words, the church at work in the world, this God's harvest. We are the fullness of God's plan--the fruition. When God imagined a people, we were what God imagined. Christ was sent into this world, to begin the transformation, and here we are, the Church, God's harvest, Christ's body, the fruition of God's plan--sent into the world to change the world.

Church, if we ever need a self-esteem boost, read this prayer. This is who we are!

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And yet, so often we get sidetracked from this reality. We forget why we exist? We focus on the details and the means, but not on our mission. As we talked about a couple weeks ago, we think our purpose is to put on worship experiences, or entertain our children and keep our youth in line, or serve coffee and cookies, or have movie nights, or volunteer and collect money for coats and provide meeting spaces for Scouts. These are all great things, but at the end of the day, but if this is all we're about, how are we that much different from the other great service organizations in our community.

Why do we exist? We ought to be the place where God lives.

That's why our writer prays that the "eyes of [our] hearts be enlightened," so that we know who we really are.

We are the people of God, church, and God's power is at work within us. Through us, God is able to do far more than we could ever ask or imagine, far more than coffee or cookies, or movie nights and service nights--through us, God is filling the world.

It's not that the things we do are wrong, they're wonderful. Our life together is a beautiful thing, and the cookies and baked goods you all make, they're something straight from heaven.

But these things, they are not the end, the goal. They are a part of the transformation, but they are not the fruition.

The fruition comes as we see people turning their lives to Christ. When people begin to find hope again. When our community begins to look and act more just. When people who have no home, find home. When we go out from these walls, and plant gardens of God's love all around our community. This is what it looks like when God's vision becomes fruition, and we are the people of God.

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Right now, we've gone through some disorientation in the last 6 weeks. Some of our soil has been tilled and disrupted, reorganized a bit as we soon try on a new worship time schedule. It's something new. And with all things new, it will take some getting used to.

But this has been good for us, I think. Like all times of disorientation, we've been made to find our way again. We've had to think about our life together more intentionally, in new ways. It's given us a chance to reexamine our own reasons for being a part of this church. Are we a part of this church because the worship time or style? Are we here because this is where we see friends? Are we here because our needs are being met? Or are we here to meet God?

The truth is, it doesn't matter when we gather. 8:30, 10:30 or 10am, Sunday morning, Sunday evening, Saturday Evening, and Wednesday night--Christians gather whenever they gather, but guess what--God shows up. God always shows up. When God's people gather, God is there.

And week after week, God stands in the pulpit and preaches--well really, it's more of a prayer. God says to us, "I pray you come to know me, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he I have called you...what is the immeasurable greatness of my power for you who believe...."

God prays for *us*, that our eyes will be open to see God, pouring his life into Christ, and Christ pouring his life into us.

And that we, seeing this cosmic power filling us up, would take our overfilled lives, and begin to pour God's power into this world.

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Next week is the First Sunday of Advent, the beginning of the Christian Year, which means today is the last day of the Christian Year, a Sunday that's come to be known as Christ the King Sunday. It's a Sunday when we remind ourselves that though there are

many rulers and loyalties in our lives, our King is Christ, and we are a part of a kingdom not built by human hands. Our calling as the church is not make that kingdom more a reality in the world around us.

Maybe you've watched or read the news lately: our world needs God.

There are too many gardens of hate and injustice being imagined. Too many walls being built. Too many closed doors and closed tables. Our world needs God. Our world needs the *people* of God, bold and ready, bringing to fruition God's vision of the beloved community.

May our eyes be opened to that truth, and may we be a church where God is alive, changing us so that we can change the world.

Or, as we pray every Sunday, may God's kingdom come, God's will be brought to fruition, on earth and in our lives, as it is heaven. Amen.