**Stimulated by the Spirit**

Text: Ephesians 5:18-21

Rev. David Waldron

**Scriptures:** Acts 2:1-13; Ephesians 5:15-21

**Songs Chosen:** ‘O God beyond all praising’, ‘O Great God’, [SttL] 349, 348, 106

**Series:** Ephesians (#21)

(first Sunday back together as a whole congregation after COVID-19 lockdown)

**Theme:** The Apostle Paul contrasts an unordered, unproductive life with a Holy Spirit-filled life which is characterised by praise, thanksgiving and the promotion of others.

**Proposition:** Be filled with the Spirit!

**Introduction**

We rejoice today that we have moved to Alert Level 1 as a country, primarily because we can resume meeting together as a whole congregation. For many others in our country there is also great gladness that the previous restrictions on life within New Zealand have been removed. Many have greatly missed their regular gatherings at bars and other hospitality venues for ‘happy hour’ drinks after work. The phrase ‘happy hour’ has long been used to describe pleasant times. (William Shakespeare wrote in act 1, scene 1 of ‘King Henry V’ “Therefore my lords, omit no happy hour”). The idea of drinking alcohol before dinner has roots in the prohibition era in the USA when people would consume liquor before eating at restaurants where alcohol could not be served.

As we heard last week, excessive alcohol suppresses a person’s ability to be self-controlled by affecting the higher senses in the brain which govern our understanding, judgement, and power to make wise assessments of ourselves, others and our surroundings. The drunk is a prodigal who throws away the ability to think and reason clearly, together with good relationships and productive living. A life controlled by an intoxicating substance or evil desire is a wasteful, unfruitful, ultimately unsatisfying existence. A drunk person is sometimes described as ‘*being under the influence*’ (of alcohol).

This helps us to understand what being ‘filled with the Spirit’ means. Being ‘filled with the Holy Spirit does not mean being ‘topped up’ as with a liquid poured into a container. It’s not like going to the petrol station to fill the tank of your car. Being ‘filled with the Spirit’ means being ‘under the influence’ of the person of the Holy Spirit. Some suggest that the filling of the Holy Spirit is an emotional experience that takes place at certain moments, but the concept of "filling" in Scripture is one of being controlled by the Holy Spirit as the comparison with drunkenness in this text indicates.

A life controlled by the Holy Spirit is an ordered and fruitful life in which the heart and mind are stimulated, aroused, activated, energized, inflamed, and motivated to live the very best life possible on this earth. The Holy Spirit enlivens the heart, enlarging it, opening it up, filling the person with all that is good and true. The Spirit moves and stimulates the will and fires up the affections.

There is an important difference between the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the filling of the Holy Spirit. All believers in Jesus Christ have God's Spirit living within them, or dwelling within them (John 14:16, Ephesians 1:13, 2 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 4:30); but not all believers live their lives filled or controlled by the Spirit's power. Some Christians describe this distinction by saying believers ‘*have all of the Holy Spirit but the Holy Spirit may not have all of them*’. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit at the time of our salvation in the one-time event of supernatural regeneration. We are filled by Him when we submit to Him throughout our lives.

The filling of the Holy Spirit can vary in the life of each believer. Negatively, a believer in Christ can "quench" or "grieve" the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19; Ephesians 4:30). Sinful actions can hinder the work of God's Spirit in his or her life. In contrast, when a believer in Christ lives in obedience to God's will and commands, he or she should expect to see God's Spirit living through them. At times living a Spirit-filled life may include emotional or ‘mountain-top’ experiences but these are not the essence of being filled with the Spirit.

The idea of being filled by the Spirit is more about an ongoing sense of God's Spirit working in a person's life rather than an occasional experience. As the believer lives out his or her faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit increasingly controls or fills his or her life; this leads to much fruitfulness, which includes joyful praise, thankfulness, and right relationships. The Apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians about how Spirit-filled people live in chapters 5 and 6. In our text he focusses on this in the realm of the church community, in Ephesians 5:22-33 in the realm of Christian marriage, in Ephesians 6:1-4 in the Christian home, in Ephesians 6:5-9 in the workplace.

Let’s now look at what a Holy Spirit controlled life looks like in the community of the church under three headings:

1. Spirit-filled saints sing from their heart
2. Spirit-filled saints give thanks for everything
3. Spirit-filled saints submit to one another
4. **Spirit-filled saints sing from their heart**

The importance of emotions is increasingly recognised in the wider world. Whilst the IQ ‘Intelligence quotient’ as a measure of human intelligence was developed at the start of the 20th century (by Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon), the EQ ‘Emotional quotient’ is a more recent development (Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer 1990). Emotional Intelligence is the ability to recognise, understand and monitor our emotions and also the emotions of others.

If you wanted to understand human emotions which do you think would be the best book in the Bible to start with? In the preface to his commentary on the Psalms, Reformer John Calvin wrote: ‘*I have been accustomed to call this book, I think not inappropriately, “An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul;” for there is not an* ***emotion*** *of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror*’.

In our text, we find the Apostle Paul referring to the psalms when he writes in verses 18 and 19: *“do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart”.*

Did you know that Paul was a singer himself? Remember that time when he and Silas were locked up in prison in Philippi. Around midnight you might have expected them to be complaining about the difficulty they had sleeping with their feet fastened in stocks in the inner prison (Acts 16:24) or perhaps anxiously awake, fearful for their lives. The reality was neither of these things, as Luke records in Acts 16:25 “*Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them*”.

After John Bunyan’s character Christian is repeatedly delivered from danger in ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’ he goes along his way singing. It is interesting that when the throne room of God is described in the book of Revelation, we see that those around the throne are singing praise to the Lamb of God (Rev 5:9-10). One of the many changes that came as a result of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century was the recovery of singing in the church by gathered congregations. It has been said that ‘where the true gospel is known and believed, music is loved and sung’.

The Greek word translated ‘psalm’ in our text, means ‘a song designed to be sung with the accompaniment of instrumental music’. We find 150 of these psalms in the book of the same name in the Old Testament (ref. Acts 1:20; 13:33). A “hymn” is a song of praise to God, a divine song. A ‘spiritual song’ is a song which is sung by someone with a Spirit-filled heart.

Attempts have been made by some Christians to identify the precise type and origin of the songs referred to by the different terms ‘psalms, hymns and spiritual songs’. Others have argued that they all refer to the Holy Spirit-inspired songs in Scripture. However, it is unlikely that the Apostle Paul was identifying sharp distinctions in Eph 5:19 and Col 3:16, but rather stating the reality that Spirit-filled Christians are singers of many songs of praise to God as they recognise, understand and monitor their emotions.

The politician, judge and author Pliny the Younger (61-113AD) reported to the Roman Emperor Trajan that the Christians in Bithynia met on a fixed day before dawn and ‘*recited an antiphonal hymn to Christ as God*’. In ‘antiphonal’ singing some people sing and others respond. Notice in verse 19 that Spirit-filled Christians are to speak to one another through the means of singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. We rightly understand congregational worship to include singing praises to the Lord. We could call this ‘vertical song’.

However, there is also to be ‘horizontal’ singing when we meet together. The Spirit-filled Christian sings, not only to the Lord, but also to his or her brothers and sisters in Christ. There is a mutual edification, or building up of one another, as we sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs together as a Spirit-filled congregation. We haven’t been able to sing together as a whole congregation for many weeks now and we have felt our loss of the blessing of doing so.

My late father, who sadly died with no evidence in his life of ever having come to saving faith in Christ, had many criticisms of the church. One of these gripes or complaints was that if he attended, he would have to sing – something which he said he could not do because he was quote ‘tone deaf’ when it came to singing.

However, Bible commentator John Stott has noted that Ephesians 5:19 is "*an instruction from which unmusical people unable to sing in tune have always derived much comfort*”. It doesn’t really matter whether you are a good singer or not. That’s at least part of the point, Paul makes when he writes ‘*singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart*’. What’s important is that your heart is ‘in tune’ with the Spirit who guides you in joyful praise to the Lord.

Now, lest you think that I am encouraging purposefully poor-quality congregational singing, let me quote from some ‘instructions in singing’ which John Wesley wrote:

* **Sing all** - See that you join with the congregation as frequently as you can. Let not a slight degree of weakness or weariness hinder you.
* **Sing lustily and with good courage** - Beware of singing as if you were half dead, or half asleep; but lift up your voice with strength.
* **Sing modestly** - Do not bawl, so as to be heard above, or distinct from, the rest of the congregation, that you may not destroy the harmony; but strive to unite your voices together, so as to make one clear melodious sound.
* **Sing in time** - Whatever time is sung, be sure to keep with it. Do not run before, nor stay behind it.
* **Above all, sing spiritually** - Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing Him more than yourself, or anyone else.

I suggest to you that singing from a heart filled with the Holy Spirit is the most ‘emotionally intelligent’ activity human beings can engage in. This is what we were designed by God to do as we recognise, understand and monitor our emotions as we sing praises to our Lord and to one another. Our expressed emotion may be sorrow for sin, for injustice in the world, for oppression by our enemies, or one of many other possibilities. However the dominant emotion for God’s people is joyful gratitude for all that Lord is and for all that He has done, which brings us to our 2nd point.

1. **Spirit-filled saints give thanks for everything**

The value of a thankful attitude for human mental health is increasingly recognised in the wider world today. As with so many ‘discoveries’ in the secular world, as non-believers observe how human beings function, there is an underlying reality which they completely miss. Paul writes about the Spirit-filled life in verse 20: “*Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*”. The Greek word translated ‘giving thanks’ literally means ‘to freely give well’. For the Christian thanksgiving is the expression of gratitude to the Lord for the mercy and favour which He has shown.

Notice that thanksgiving is ‘always and for everything’. We experience many different emotions as we live our lives on this earth: afraid, annoyed, angry, confused, unsettled, embarrassed, hurt, sad, tense, vulnerable, affectionate, engaged, hopeful, confident, excited, inspired, joyful, exhilarated, calm, refreshed. However, there is one emotion that is never absent from the person who is full of the Holy Spirit: gratitude.

One of the characteristics of those who are separated from God is thanklessness, as Paul says to the Romans: “*They did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened*” (Rom 1:21). One of the sins of Old Testament Israel was that they were thankless. Having been miraculously delivered from captivity in Egypt, they grumbled against Moses and Aaron (Exo 16:2); but more importantly against the Lord (16:7).

The Spirit-filled believer is full of thanksgiving to the Lord, not full of complaints, criticisms, gripes, grievances, and dissatisfactions. He or she is not a ‘whiner’ but is full of gratitude. The fourteenth-century German priest and theologian, Johann Tauler, wrote about the day he met a beggar on the street and said to him ‘God give you a good day, my friend’. The beggar answered, ‘I thank God I never had a bad one.’ Then Tauler said, ‘God give you a happy life, my friend.’ ‘I thank God’, said the beggar, ‘that I am never unhappy.’ In amazement Tauler asked, ‘What do you mean?’ ‘Well,’ said the beggar, ‘when it is fine, I thank God. When it rains, I thank God. When I have plenty, I thank God. When I am hungry, I thank God. And, since God’s will is my will, and whatever pleases him pleases me, why should I say I am unhappy when I am not?” Tauler looked at the man in astonishment. ‘Who are you?’ he asked. ‘I am a king,’ said the beggar. ‘Where, then, is your kingdom?’ asked Tauler. The beggar replied quietly, ‘In my heart’.

One of the many blessings of the Protestant Reformation was the recovery of the Biblical truth of gratitude as the response of God’s people to salvation by faith alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone, according to the Scriptures alone, for God’s glory alone. We are not saved **by** good works, but **for** good works. The good works which we do, in the words of Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 32, ‘*show that we are thankful to God for all he has done for us and so that he may be praised through us*’.

Those in the unbelieving world who have observed that thankfulness is good for mental health and human wellbeing are correct, but they do not understand how it is possible for a person to be thankful always and for everything. As the Holy Spirit teaches us all things (John 14:26), He helps us to see **why** we can give thanks without reservation in every and all circumstances to ‘*God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*’.

As we are filled with the Spirit, we thank God for the material blessings He gives, being satisfied with exactly what we have. As Paul declared to the Philippians “*I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need*” (Phil 4:11b-12).

As we are filled with the Spirit, we thank God for His good work in our lives when we are in the midst of trials (ref. James 1:2-3). When Daniel learned that evil men were plotting to destroy him “*He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and* ***gave thanks*** *before his God, as he had done previously*” (Dan 6:10b). Daniel was a man under the influence of the Holy Spirit. As we are filled with the Spirit, we thank God for His salvation in Jesus Christ. Paul put this into these words “*Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!*” (2 Cor 9:15).

As we are filled with the Spirit, we thank God for His presence in our lives as He moulds and shapes us to become more like Christ. Paul describes this process of Holy Spirit influenced change in these words “*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure*” (Phil 2:12-13).

As we are filled with the Spirit, we thank God for the His people in our lives. Paul wrote to the Corinthians “*I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus*” (1 Cor 1:4) The community of the saints brings us to our 3rd point:

1. **Spirit-filled saints submit to one another**

Social distancing and being locked down at home for an extended time has had damaging consequences for some in our country and around the world. Secular psychologists recognise that lack of social connection has a significant effect on human health. However, it’s not just about ‘being in a relationship’ but also about having people around you who support and encourage you. This truth was summarised by the Lord God long ago when, after having created a single human being, He said: "*It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him*" (Gen 2:18).

However, we know both from history and from our own experience that human relationships are often difficult. The Spirit-filled new creation in Christ is enabled to repair the broken connections between people by doing, amongst other things, what Paul writes about in verse 21: “*submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ*”. The Greek word translated ‘submit’ literally means ‘to place under in an orderly fashion’. We have been used to letting go of personal freedoms in lockdown for the sake of the country as a whole. We have submitted to our New Zealand national Government as a ‘team of five million’. For many, the motivation was a common goal of ‘beating the virus’.

Notice, in contrast, the reason for mutual submission in our text: ‘*out of reverence for Christ*’. We could say it this way ‘*because we love Jesus and willingly place ourselves under His rule in an orderly fashion*’. As we are filled with the Holy Spirit, He enables us to willingly submit to Christ and thereby express our love for our Lord. Brothers and sisters, He does not ask of us something which He Himself has not already done. As He said "*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*." (Matt 20:25-28)

Jesus taught His disciples about submission when He washed their feet. He taught His disciples about submission when He willingly laid down His life for God’s people. The Spirit enables those He fills to have the same attitude as that of Christ who “*though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*” (Phil 2:6-8). The Spirit-filled saint is not self-assertive. He or she does not insist on getting his or her own way, but willingly promotes the interest of others ahead of his or her own.

Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones writes about someone who lacks the filling of the Spirit in this way: “*They are self-centred, and selfish, individualistic and thoughtless, and self-seeking. Such a person resents criticism, and is impatient of other points of view. If I am very proud in my opinion then the fact that anyone should dare to question it or to query it is a gross insult to me – not to the truth, but to me….What a foul disease is self-centeredness! Notice the multiplicity of the symptoms. It affects the whole of a person’s outlook, every part of him or her – his or her thinking, emotions, actions, and will*”. A self-centred person is not full of the Spirit. Imagine an army where each soldier just did as they pleased. What a hopeless force that would be. They could not function as an effective unit.

When a person joins the army, he or she signs away their right to determine their own life and activity. So, it is with us as soldiers of Christ, brothers and sisters. As we are filled with the Spirit, we give ourselves over more and more to doing Christ’s will, to submitting willingly to our brothers and sisters in the Lord according to the patterns laid out in Scripture. We’ll look at these in more detail in the coming weeks within marriage, family and the workplace.

As we are filled with the Spirit, we find ourselves enabled to give thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We sing to the Lord with all our heart. Congregational worship is the ‘happy hour’ for God’s people, but so also are all the other times of the week, when we are filled with the Spirit and the joy of our salvation in Christ.

Are you stimulated by the Holy Spirit, under His divine influence, as you join together with the community of the saints in song, thanksgiving and mutual submission to one another?

AMEN.