



## Sermon Transcript

### June 3, 2018

## Shepherds and Souls

### The Fullness of Christ

Ephesians 1:22-23

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on June 3, 2018 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio version of this sermon can be found on the church website at [www.wethefc.com](http://www.wethefc.com).

**Sermon Text**  
**Ephesians 1:22-23**

<sup>22</sup> And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,  
<sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

## Introduction

The following video is an invitation from the North American Mission Board to come to New England and partner with what they are doing with church planting. The video does a good job at helping us understand the spiritual need where God has placed us as a local church.<sup>1</sup>

Before this video is over, you will see 100 faces. If they represent 14.5 million souls in New England . . . .

- 54 aren't sure God is real.
- 30 believe that no one really knows what happens after we die.
- 19 hope they will get to heaven by living a good life.
- 47 say they are not religious.
- 59 "seldom or never" attend religious services.
- At least 43 are part of "Christian" churches who don't teach the gospel clearly
- 5 are atheists.
- 6 are agnostic.
- 19 are nothing . . . Bu t 6 of them still feel religion is important.
- Only 4 are part of an evangelical church.
- In fact, Egypt has a higher percentage of evangelical Christians than New England.
- America's four "least religious" states are located in New England . . . As are 5 of the 6 "most post-Christian" cities.

Would you come to New England to help share the Gospel?

Sometimes when I picture New England, I picture geography; six states clustered together in the upper northeastern corner of the country. There is Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island. I picture mountains and lakes and fall foliage and a coastal shoreline. Sometimes when I picture New England, I picture culture; flannel shirts, Red Sox hats, lobsters, rugged individualism, educated elite, men with full beards, an inability to pronounce the letter "R", and there is a certain pride in those who are born and rooted in this region for generations. I remember hearing the story of a woman who was born in New York and she moved to Vermont when she was 2 years old. She spent the next 96 years living in Vermont. Her obituary read, "Woman from New York dies at 98 years old." That is New England.

But this video reminds us that when we think of New England, we really need to think about people. It is 14.5 million people strong. God has placed us among a people, who

for the large part, don't know about Jesus and who need Jesus. The statistic that jumped out the most to me in this video is that "Egypt has a higher percentage of evangelicals than New England." We are here for such a time as this.

Sometimes when I picture the church in New England, I picture those white iconic churches that you find at the center of New England towns. You often see these churches in picturesque portraits or paintings of the landscape of a typical New England town. Their location at the center of town is a reminder of what used to be true of many of these towns when they were originally settled and established. The church was at the center of life. Sometimes when I think of the current church in New England, I think of an institution that has waning influence in the surrounding culture and is just trying hard to keep the doors open and to pass on faith to the next generation.

And yet, again, this video reminds me that the church is not a building, though we meet in one. Nor is the church simply an institution that provides programs for its members and seeks to do good in the community. Rather, this video reminds me that the church is also people. We didn't come to church this morning. We don't point to our building with its steeple and cross at the top of it and say, "there is the church!" We are the church. We are the church gathered this morning. This building happens to be where the church assembles on Sunday mornings to worship the Triune God. It is the place from which the church scatters when we leave this place. Again, it is people.

When Paul comes to the end of Ephesians 1, he says something about the church that ought to inspire us. He says something here about the church that ought to empower us as we seek to be the church in New England. He says something here about the church that ought to encourage us as we live among the people of New England. He says here that the church is the body of Christ, *"the fullness of him who fills all in all."*

What does it mean that the church is the body of Christ? And what does it mean that the church is *"the fullness of him who fills all in all."* I have been pondering that phrase for some time. Whatever it is, it sounds "big." It seems rather significant. Perhaps it even challenges how we often feel about the church in this spiritually dark corner of the country. It challenges the feeling you might have of the church being of little consequence in this region or of waning influence in this region where we happen to live. It is also a phrase that seems rather philosophical or lofty, *"the fullness of him who fills all in all."* What does that mean? This morning I want to take "the cookies" of this rather majestic statement about the church and put them down where we can all grab it and taste it. My prayer is that it encourages us to boldly be the church in New England.

## Christ: The Head of the Church

We begin with Jesus. We can't understand what Paul is saying here about the church until we take a look at what he is saying about Jesus. Our passage this morning is two verses that come at the end of a prayer that actually begins in verse 15. In this prayer, starting in verse 20, Paul has a rather lengthy statement about Jesus. It is a lofty statement about Jesus. It is a statement that begins with the resurrection of Jesus and then moves quickly to the ascension of Jesus. It is a statement that acknowledges that Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords. He is sovereign over all things. Paul says of Jesus here in verse 21 that Jesus is *"far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come."*

And so we come to verse 22 this morning and we read this statement about Jesus, *"And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church."* Simply put, Jesus is the head of the church. This one who is sovereign over all things is the head of the church. With all this talk we have had recently about the leadership of the church and the role of elders, someone asked me last week— "who then would be the leader of the church?" I understood the question and it was a good one. In one sense, there is a plurality of elders leading the church. In another sense, within that plurality often the pastor has a leading role among the leaders. In another sense, as a congregational form of government the congregation has final say on various matters in the church. "So who is the leader?" But my initial response was that "Jesus is the head of the church." The rest of us are servants and stewards of what belongs to Jesus.

Now here is the encouragement we get from this picture. The one who is head of the church also happens to be *"head over all things."* Do you know what that includes? It includes New England. Jesus, the head of the church, is at work through his church in New England and Jesus is alive and well. Jesus is not frustrated by the statistics and nor is he immobilized by the sway of culture. Rather, he is powerfully and sovereignly at work in this corner of our country. In fact, in this prayer, Paul prays in verse 19 that we might know *"what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe."* Francis Foulkes says of this in his commentary on Ephesians, "There is given to the Church, and for the Church's benefit, a Head who is also Head over all things. The Church has authority and power to overcome all things because her Leader and Head is Lord of all."<sup>2</sup> I look at that and I say that New England does not stand a chance at resisting the work of the church in this region.

That video was an invitation for people to come to New England. People are coming to this region, prompted by the Spirit of God. Churches are being planted and churches are being revitalized. With Jesus as the head of the church, the gates of hell will not prevail against the advance of God's kingdom in New England.

### **The Church: The Presence of Christ**

Paul then moves from Jesus to the church. While Jesus is the head of the church, the church is the body of Christ. Paul concludes his prayer by saying of the church, "*which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*"

There are certain phrases that become so familiar to us that we can tend to gloss over them and not ponder what they mean. With relative ease we often affirm this to be true, the church is the body of Christ. But do you ever stop to think about what that is communicating about the church? And what does it mean when Paul adds to this thought that the church is "*the fullness of him.*" How are we "*the fullness of Jesus?*"

Paul uses that word "*fullness*" in other places. For example he uses it to describe the deity of Jesus in Colossians 1:19. He says of Jesus, "*For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.*" Jesus came in body, born of a Virgin. He took on human flesh. And yet, was fully God. And so, John tell us in John 1 that Jesus *became flesh and he dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" In other words, when we look at Jesus we see what God is like. In fact John goes on to say in John 1:16-18, "*And from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace . . . No one has ever seen God, the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*" So Paul says of Jesus again in Colossians 2:9, "*For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells in bodily form.*" So in Jesus, we have the embodiment of God. He is the divine Son of God. Through the power of the resurrection we have that final stamp of approval that declares Jesus to be the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord.

We get that. For those who believe, this is not something new to us, nor is it something we have trouble embracing. Jesus is the fullness of God. He made known to us what God is like. He is the final revelation of God to us. We know what God is like by what we see in Jesus. But now we are told that the church is the fullness of Jesus. In fact after Paul says in Colossians 2:9 that in Jesus *the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form*, he then says in verse 10, "*and you [the church] have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.*" So just as Jesus is the fullness of God, the church is the fullness of Jesus. Let me put it this way. Just as Jesus demonstrates to the world what God is like, the

church demonstrates to the world what Jesus is like. We are the body of Christ. We are the physical presence of Jesus in New England. Foulkes says it this way in his commentary, “We may paraphrase this by saying that it is God’s purpose that the church should be the full expression of Jesus Christ, who Himself fills everything.”<sup>3</sup> So then the operating question is, “Do they see Jesus in us?”

We know ourselves all too well, don’t we? I like the way Donald MacNair poses the challenge of the church being the presence of Christ in the world. He asks, “How can the world see Christ in a sin-ridden collection of converts?”<sup>4</sup> It is a question that recognizes that as the church we are a people still in progress. We don’t always demonstrate Christ the way we wish we would. MacNair says that when Jesus forms the church it is “like a home buyer purchasing a fixer-upper. God marries a bride riddled with blemishes and covered with grime, and sets about perfecting her.”<sup>5</sup> But it is in that very process of transformation that the church becomes the fullness of Christ and the church is able to demonstrate Jesus to the world.

Here is how the church is the fullness of Jesus to the world. “When something changes a hardened criminal into a humble benefactor, when loving relationships grow across ethnic or racial barriers, when people keep promises and tell the truth even to their own hurt, or when a congregation mercifully addresses a community need, the world will recognize the presence of supernatural power and holiness.”<sup>6</sup> That is how *the fullness of him who fills all in all* is on display in the life of the church. It is through the transformation that Jesus does in us that causes us to love God and love others.

As the body of Christ, we become the visible demonstration to the world of what Jesus is like. No one can argue against a life that has been changed. The fullness of Jesus is demonstrated to the world through our worship of Jesus, our humble daily and weekly confession of sin, our coming under the instruction of God’s Word and our love for others—especially the marginalized, the sinner and the poor. That is how Jesus showed us what the Father is like. When we take that presence of Jesus with us wherever we are scattered during the week and when people see the difference that Jesus makes in our life—through our words of kindness and our gentle touch—light advances against the darkness and the church becomes the fullness of Christ to the world.

### **The Leaders: Growing Up in Christ**

This brings us to church leadership. We have been talking several weeks now about elders in the church. Last week we looked at deacons and their role in the church.

Shortly, we are going to present to you our leaders for the coming year and commission them to serve in this capacity. But to what end?

In Ephesians 4:11, Paul identifies the gifts of leadership given to the local church. He says that God gave to the church “*the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers.*” We have noted in this series that this is the only place you find the title “pastor” in the New Testament and it could be translated as *shepherd*. It is a reference to elders. So, to what end did God give these functions of leadership in the church? Paul goes on to say that they are there to equip the body to do the work of the ministry. But it still doesn’t answer the question, “to what end?”

Notice what Paul says in verse 13. It is to maturity. It is growing up in Christ. Or as Paul says in this verse, that we would mature “*to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*” There is that word again, “*fullness.*” So in some sense this fullness we have in Christ is not fully developed in us in this life. We will always be a work in progress. But at the same time it is being developed in us as we mature in our faith. Here too, Paul refers to Jesus as the *head of the body* at the end of verse 15. But this time it speaks to the mystical union we share with Christ. As we are united to him, we are growing up in him and becoming more like him and in doing so, we bring the presence of Christ with us. It is the job of our leaders to help us as a church grow up in Christ so that we can be the presence of Christ that New England needs us to be.

Jesus is the head of the church and he has authority over all things, including New England. Watch out New England! The church of Jesus Christ is on the move. The Holy Spirit is stirring the hearts of his church. People are moving to New England for this very reason. We too are submitting ourselves to the Lordship of Christ and we are going to cross bridges and extend mercy and practice hospitality and proclaim Jesus crucified for our sins and risen from the dead and live with the confidence that the church of Christ is advancing.

We are the fullness of Christ, the very physical presence of Jesus in this community. Are we perfect? No. But that is to our advantage because the gospel is not for perfect people. It is for sinners like you and me. So what are we then? We are humble. We are loving. We turn the other cheek. We embrace our enemy. We feed the hungry, and clothe the naked and stand up for the oppressed. We forgive. We proclaim Jesus and the gospel. We live for others to see Jesus in us.

We have leaders who step into their role to help us mature so that we grow in becoming



more and more the *fullness of Christ* to this community. These leaders are not just here to fill open slots that need to be filled. Rather, it is their ambition that the church be the presence of Christ, the fullness of Christ to this community, and it is to this end that they labor. Why? Because this community and New England - 14.5 million people —need to see Jesus. If not through us, then how will they see him?

### **Installation:**

It is to this end that we install our leaders to serve WEFC this year. It was the custom in the New Testament that when leaders were set aside for service in the church that the elders would lay hands on them and install them. This was Timothy's experience. In fact, when Timothy was going through a hard time, Paul reminded him that he was commissioned for this purpose and that he was to hang in there. He said in 2 Timothy 1:6-7, *"For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self control."* When the church in Antioch sent the first missionaries—Paul and Silas—they laid hands on them and commissioned them for this task. And so set apart our leaders for the task of leading WEFC.

Our leaders are comprised of our pastoral staff: Pastor Scott, Pastor Mike and Pastor Ryan.

Our Deacons: Ned Cornwall, Skip Hardy, Brian Hucks, Steve Keller, Daryl Ostergren, Steve Peery, John Rascius and Dale Reese.

Members at Large on the Executive Board: Gerry Gingras (Trustees), Dave Gough (Missions) Don Jensen and Jack Jensen.

These men were nominated by our nominating committee. The Executive Board then presented them to the congregation and the congregation affirmed them through a vote. Each man is able to serve for three years and they are eligible to serve two consecutive terms. They have been recognized for their faithful character and their dedication to the work of WEFC. They are being commissioned to equip the body that we might grow up in the fullness of Christ so that we can be the presence of Jesus in this community and throughout New England and the world.

**To the Executive Board:** The appointment given you by your fellow members is one that should be entered into with solemnity and faith. We are not sufficient of ourselves for such a responsibility. But God, who has called us, "is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all time, having all that you need, you will abound in every

good work.”

It is imperative that you guard your conduct and speech. In a special sense, you are examples and models. The measure of your godliness and zeal will be copied by others. Do not be an occasion for stumbling—ever.

Be concerned for the needs of the church family. Your title may be a member of the Executive Board of WEFC, but like first century Stephen—who was set apart for a specific ministry, you are to be full of the Spirit and wisdom, versed in the Scriptures, ready to witness and, if need be, to die for your Lord.

Give careful attention as well to the office entrusted to you. As unto the Lord, fulfill all its functions. By accepting this trust, you indicate without reservation your commitment and loyalty to the message, doctrine, constitution and world-wide program of WEFC. Be faithful that you may enter with joy into the presence of your Lord, to whom you shall render account.

Do you now accept your office as a sacred and solemn trust from the Lord Jesus Christ, promising him and this church to fulfill its responsibilities and ministries as indicated above to the best of your ability? If so, say, “I do.”

Will you strive with God’s help to be examples of Christ in the midst of those whom he has set you as leaders, holding the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience? If so, say, “I will.”

**To the Congregation:** Do you, the members of this church, acknowledge and receive these leaders, entering with them into the spirit of the vows they have just made to God and this church? Do you promise to honor them, encourage them, cooperate with them and pray for them, as the Word of God and the constitution of this church admonish? If so, say, “We will.”

**Prayer of Commitment:** Heavenly Father, we thank you for these men standing here before this congregation. We ask that they would be full of your Spirit and that through their Christian example and their servant-leadership that we as a church would truly be the fullness of Christ and that we would grow up into the head, which is Christ. Keep our eyes on Jesus, and give to us a broken heart for people in this region who are yet to know Jesus. May this community see Jesus in us. May you raise up a movement from this local body that reaches well into this region for the sake of your kingdom. Protect

our unity. Provide the resources we need to meet the calling you give to us. May Jesus be glorified through WEFC. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen!

---

<sup>1</sup><https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oxgVdXXoldVcTNFZtfzv9fTRkyPRCL-h/view>

<sup>2</sup>Francis Foulkes *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 65

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 66

<sup>4</sup>Donald MacNair *The Practices of a Healthy Church* (Philipsburgh: P&R Publishing, 1999) Kindle Reader Location, 486

<sup>5</sup>Ibid

<sup>6</sup>Ibid

**Sermon Title:** The Fullness of Christ

**Sermon Text:** Ephesians 1:22-23

**Sermon Date:** June 3, 2018

## COMMUNITY GROUPS

### **Getting To Know Me Questions**

1. What is your favorite state in New England to visit? Share what you like about that state.
2. Do you tend to feel optimistic or pessimistic about the state of the church in New England? Why? What statistic in the video caught your attention (pg. 3) Why?
3. What word of encouragement did you get from the sermon this week?

### **Diving Into The Word**

4. Read Ephesians 1:19-22. What do these verses tell us about Jesus? Where do you see Jesus at work in this world?
5. Read Ephesians 1:23 and Colossians 2:9-10. The church is “the fullness of Christ” on earth. How does that impact the way you think of the church?
6. The church is “the presence of Christ on earth.” How do people see Jesus through the church? What does this say about the importance of our testimony?
7. Read Ephesians 4:11-16. God gives leaders to the church to help the body of Christ mature “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (v. 13) How does that impact how you view the role of church leadership?

### **Taking It Home**

8. Read the vows on pages 9-10. What stands out to you?
9. Take a look at the names of the leaders of WEFC. Spend time praying for them. Thank God for them and their service. How can you be an encouragement to them?