

Body Works – How to Keep Your Tank Full
Ephesians 1:17-23

AAA reports that their calls for assistance are increasing because of people running out of gas on the roadside. They report that people are trying to get more miles per gallon than their car can make. They are also finding that people are trying to get further down the highway on an empty tank to where the gas is pennies cheaper. Running out of gas on the roadside does not usually make for a good day. I have another question for us though: how often do we run out of gas physically, or emotionally, or perhaps most importantly, spiritually?

Our theme for June and July is “Body Works”. By the way, Dr. Bruce Johnson prepared a “Body Works” journal for you to use each day with your Bible reading. Copies are available at the Guest Center in the lobby. The Apostle Paul wrote the book of Ephesians to teach the church what it means to be the body of Christ. While Jesus was alive on earth, He lived in this earthly body just as we do today. In Vs 22-23 we read that the church is the body of Christ for our world today. We are His hands and His feet. We are to share His message of faith, hope and love. We are to go to the unloved and forgotten, the poor and the aliens and the imprisoned with the good news of Jesus.

To understand this passage we have to think community. Perhaps you remember me or another pastor saying that there is no lone ranger Christianity. I believe that is an important lesson in this passage. Let’s look through chapter one to see this. Notice the repeated use of the plural.

In Vs 1 Paul writes to the **saints** or the **believers** in the city of Ephesus. In Vs 4 Paul says that God has chosen **us** “... to be holy and blameless in His sight”. This continues in Vs 5 where the Bible says that God predestined or planned for **us** “... to be adopted as His sons and daughters through Jesus”. In Vs 6 Paul writes that God’s glorious grace has been given to **us** in Jesus. In Vs 7 we read that “**we** have redemption”. In Vs 8 we read of His grace that was lavished on **us**. In Vs 9 we read that God has made known to **us** the mystery of His will. In Vs 11 we read that **we** were chosen so that, in Vs 11, **we** “might be for the praise of His glory”. And finally, in Vs 22-23 we come to the heart of our message for this morning: “God placed all things under His

(Jesus') feet and appointed Him to be the head over everything **for the church**, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way".

From time to time we might hear someone say that they love Jesus but they are tired of the church. And they might even tell us that they don't need the church any more. They might say that they will just worship on their own in their own way and they will be just fine. Well, according to the word of God this is not only a false understanding of Christianity and how to be like Jesus, it is a dangerous position for any of us to take.

It's like any one of us saying that we are going to drive over to the coast and never stop for gas. In just a matter of time and miles our tank is going to run dry and our engine will shut down for lack of fuel. To say that we don't need the church is like saying that we don't need gas stations. You can top off your tank and drive for a while but sooner or later your gas tank is going to empty and you will then be parked on the side of the road somewhere.

This is what the word of God is telling us about the need for community. We really do need each other. It is not just that the rest of the church needs us, we need them just as badly. As we look carefully at this passage, we see that our strength as Christians comes in community.

Jesus understood this. Consider with me the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:20 where He said that when ever two or more of us gather together He is there with us. That is a promise not given to us individually. We have this promise in community. Where ever and whenever two or more of us come together in the name of Jesus, He will be there with us.

Let me offer another example. We know that we do not need a priest or a pastor to confess our sins. The Bible says in Romans 10:9-10: "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord'. And believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." This too is a promise – if we confess to Jesus and believe in Him we will be saved. This can happen at any time and in any place if our hearts are right and sincere as we come to Jesus.

But let's compare this promise with what we read in James 5:16: "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed".

Here is what I believe this verse adds to our understanding. It is true that we can confess to Jesus anywhere and at any time and with no one else present and Jesus will forgive us. But friends, it is possible that we can be forgiven and yet still be struggling with our sin. Jesus does not want to leave us struggling to manage our sin. Jesus wants to set us free from the guilt of our sin and the power of our sin. What is the secret to this kind of healing from the guilt and power of our sin? James 5:16 is our answer – we are to confess our sins to one another and to pray for one another. What happens when we do that? Jesus says that this is how we begin to find healing from the guilt and the power of our sin.

This morning some of our leaders have reminded us of Celebrate Recovery, a new ministry that we will launch this fall. A sober alcoholic will tell you with firm conviction that sobriety cannot be found alone. It is found in community. How do we keep our spiritual tank full? We have to think community. We have to remember that we need the church which is the Body of Christ.

I love the church. I know the church is not perfect, but I love it anyway. My life calling is to bring change to the church from the inside out. It is my life desire to help the church be like Jesus so that our world may be like Jesus. And I am giving my life to do this through the church. God blesses me with a patient spirit. But I confess that I grieve as I hear people with a grumbling and complaining spirit speaking of the church. The Word of God tells us that the church is the body of Christ at work in the world today. The Bible also says that Jesus is like a groom and the church is like the bride of Christ. One day Jesus will return as a groom ready to take the church as His Bride.

Imagine a wedding. Everyone is in their place and the bride is being escorted down the aisle. She is innocent and beautiful. Her wedding dress is bright and spotless. But as she comes down the aisle someone stands up from their seat, steps out into the aisle and slaps the bride. The bride stumbles forward stunned with tears beginning to fall, and then another person steps out again and hits the bride even harder, this time knocking her to the ground. As the bride struggles to

regain her composure and move to the altar to where her groom awaits her she begins to hear people mumbling about her saying things that are not kind or appropriate. How sad would we all feel if we experienced that at a wedding? How furious would we be if that bride was our bride, or our daughter on her way to the altar to be married?

Yet that is what so many do to the bride of Christ as they grumble and complain about the church. God wants us to love the church. It is the body of Jesus in the world today. It is the bride of Christ. Is the church perfect? No, no more than we are perfect. But the church is the hope of the world. And we need to love the church.

Let's look at this in yet another way. Throughout chapter one of Ephesians we read that God wants to bless us as His church. Vs 3-14 speak of the many spiritual blessings that are ours as the church. Very quickly, Vs 3 says that we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Not some, not a few, not even most ... but **every** spiritual blessing in Christ is ours as a church. We read that God chose us to be holy and blameless. God adopted us as sons and daughters into His family. God has lavished His grace on us. God has revealed to us the mystery of His will. We were chosen according to His purposes that we might be the praise of His glory. We have the Holy Spirit as a promise from God.

These blessings continue as we read down into Vs 15-19, blessings such as a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we might better know God Himself. A blessing so that the eyes of our heart will be opened in order that we might know the hope that is ours. This blessing also includes knowing the rich inheritance that is ours in Jesus. Not my inheritance and not your inheritance, but our inheritance. It is an inheritance that belongs to the church and one that we get to get in on as a part of His church – the Body of Christ.

These are my blessings and they are your blessings, but they are not given to Roger or to Samuel or to Bruce or to any one of us individually. They are given to us as a part of His church and they find fulfillment when we come together as the church. These are blessings that God wants to pour into the church.

And with these blessings there is a power. Let's look at Vs 19-23. We really need to understand the way in which the Apostle Paul is describing this blessing. He could have said that we will be blessed with power but that in and of itself was inadequate. So Paul could have called it a great power. We might have been thrilled to know that God offers us a great power to help us be more like Jesus, but this too would have been inadequate. To fully make his point, Paul said in Vs 19 that this is an **incomparable great power** for us who believe.

Incomparable. What does this word mean? It means that there is nothing that can compare to it. There is no comparison known to man that we can find to describe it. This is awesome and amazing. I hope you are hearing this with me. God is offering to us as a church an incomparably great power.

It is offered to all of us who believe. It is not just for pastors. It is not just for those who live long faithful lives for Jesus. It is not just for those who dare to do great things for Jesus. This incomparably great power is offered to each of us as a part of His church. Who would you rather be, the ninety pound weakling who has sand kicked in his face on the beach and loses his girlfriend or the Arnold Schwarzenegger type full of muscles that ripple up and down and across his body? What I read in this passage is that God's Word tells us that each of us can have this incomparably great power in our lives. None of us have to settle for being a ninety pound spiritual weakling. That is unless we are deceived into thinking that we don't need the church and that we want to go at it alone.

Let's take a closer look at the power described and available to each of us. In Vs 19-23 we read that the power made available to us is the same power that God used when He raised Jesus from the dead. Have you ever met anyone raised from the dead? I don't think I have. It is not very common in our world. Actually it is so rare that if it happens it is considered a miracle of biblical proportions. Death has a finality to it. It is not within our power to undue death and return life to loved ones gone. But this is the very power that is at work in us. The same power that God used to bring Jesus back from the dead is the power that God now makes available to us as the church.

This power was so great that when Jesus came out of the grave, He was seated in the heavens at the right hand of the throne of God Himself. In ancient times, to be seated at the right of the throne was the highest honor that one could be given short of being offered the throne itself. Jesus was given such incomparably great power that He was invited to sit at the right hand of God the Father in heaven above. But we still haven't seen the full expression of this power.

In Vs 21 we see that Jesus was far above “all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come”. Wow – the Bible says that Jesus was not only above these powers, He was far above them.

But we still aren't done. In Vs 22 we read that “God placed all things under his feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church... “. Jesus was given a power so great that everything was placed under His feet. His power was so great that He became the head over everything. The Bible says that the enemies of Jesus will be made into a footstool for Him. In Acts 7:49 the writer quotes from the prophet Isaiah and says that heaven is Jesus' throne and the earth is His footstool.

Imagine this, the angels call out to Jesus: “Lord, can we get you anything? How about a place to rest Your feet?” And Jesus says, “Thanks but no thanks. I have the Earth. It is just right. I will rest my feet right here on this little planet called Earth”. Jesus was given an incomparably great power, so great that planet Earth is simply His footstool.

Awesome power, isn't it?! Well my friends, the Bible says that this is the same power that is available for you and for me as the church today. God wants to bless the church and this power is central to that blessing.

Now, why would God want to pour such a great blessing into the church? Is it because He loves the church? Yes, of course. But in Vs 23 we read that the church is His body and that as God fills the church He wants the church to fill the earth. God has a blessing for the church. But it is not a blessing only for us to keep and preserve. It is a blessing that He wants to use to fill the

earth. God wants to bless the world through us as His church. He fills us so that we can fill the world.

Let's take one more look at Vs 22-23: "And God placed all things under His (Jesus') feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way." There is a lot here for us to understand. As we have already noted, the church is the body of Jesus in our world today. This supports the heart of the Deer Flat family – to be like Jesus and help others be like Jesus. The Deer Flat Church is a part of the body of Christ so it is only understandable that we need to be like Jesus and help others be like Jesus.

We also see that the church is the fullness of Jesus. This again helps to explain why there is no such thing as a lone ranger Christianity. To be like Jesus we must think community. It is the church that is the fullness of Jesus.

The word used for "fullness" in Vs 23 is interesting. In the original language we can find different images that help to explain its meaning. It can refer to a ship fully manned and with cargo to capacity. Or it can refer to a completeness or fullness of time – kairos (not chronos) time. It can also refer to the body of believers filled with the presence, power, and riches of God and of Christ.

It is not a cautious or careful filling. It is a generous filling to the top, to the very brim and even to overflowing. But let's keep reading. Vs 23 tells us that out of this fullness God fills everything in every way. Here is the take home for our message this morning – God fills us so that we can fill the world with His presence.

So, let's ask ourselves - how do we keep a full tank? How do we keep a full tank of the presence of Jesus in our lives? The first thing we must realize is that we cannot keep a full tank unless we are living in community. That is the very reason why we work so hard to invite people to join us in a transformational group, whether it is a Sunday class, a Life Group that meets during the

week, or a Support Group such as Celebrate Recovery. It is in community that we keep our spiritual tank from running empty.

How do we keep our spiritual tank full? Here at Deer Flat we extend three invitations. First, we invite you to join us for inspiring worship. Second, we invite you to find community in one of our transformational groups. And third, we invite you to help us fill the world with the presence of Jesus in opportunities of compassionate service (opportunities listed in worship folder for vacation bible school and service to the Chula Vista Labor Camp). Our heart is to be like Jesus and we believe that as people engage with us in these three invitations, they will and we will keep our tanks spiritually full of the presence of Jesus. As we read the word of God, this is the best way we know to be like Jesus and to help others be like Jesus.

Okay, if this is how we keep our spiritual tank full, what should we do with a full tank? Should we hoard it? Do we need to be very careful not to lose any of it and to preserve all we can? Should we ration and conserve it? Should we use it only as needed? No.

Here is the amazing thing! The more we use the more we have. God wants us to take the presence of Jesus that He fills our lives with and then to use and share generously! There is no danger of running out. It reminds me of the story of the widow's oil in 2 Kings 4. This widow had two sons. As her husband died, he owed money that she couldn't pay. The creditors were coming to take her sons to sell as slaves in order to pay her debts. She asked the prophet Elisha to help. Elisha asked what she had in the house. She said nothing at all, except for a little oil. Let me read the rest of the story to you: "Go around and ask all of your neighbors for empty jars. Don't ask for just a few. Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side. She left him and afterward shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. When all the jars were full, she said to her son, 'Bring me another one'. But he replied, 'There is not a jar left'. Then the oil stopped flowing. She went out and told the man of God, and he said, 'Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left'."

Wow – the oil did not run out until the need was met! This is the promise of Jesus. He wants to fill us so that we can fill the world. Jesus wants us to share His presence generously. He wants us to lavishly share His presence in our world today. Jesus wants to fill everything and everyone everywhere with His presence. Again, this is the heart of the Deer Flat family – to be like Jesus so that we can help others be like Jesus. And the more of Jesus we share, the more of Jesus we have and the more like Jesus we become.

Some of you are old enough to remember the old Esso commercials about having a “tiger in your tank!” Would you like a tiger in your tank? Would you like to have a life full of the presence of Jesus? He offers the power of His presence to fill our lives.

How full is your tank? Would you like to keep your tank full? Would you like to keep your heart full of the presence of Jesus? Think community. Love the church. The church is the hope of the world. We find our greatest strength as Christians as we come together and live and serve and love as the church – the body of Christ in our world today.

Are you willing to be the Body of Christ to our world? Are you willing to help fill our world with the presence of Jesus? Wanna tiger in your tank? Lets pray.