

Ascension Lutheran Church

Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of April 19, 2009

Jesus Recharges Our Batteries and Fills Our Empty Tanks (John 20:19-31)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text is from the 20th chapter of the Gospel according to St. John:

“Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then He said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.’ Thomas answered Him: ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to Him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’”

This is the text.

Dear friends in Christ, picture if you will the aftermath of Jesus' crucifixion. The disciples were running on empty. They were emotionally and spiritually drained. They were at their lowest point. In a confused state and motivated by their fear they locked themselves in a room together. They hoped that by doing this they might save their own skin and possibly escape from receiving the same sentence as their Lord. And it is just at this low point in their lives, when their tanks were empty so to speak that Jesus appears to them; He fills them with joy and hope; He recharges their spiritual batteries. It is here that He shows them the power of His resurrection to lift up their hearts and to set them on the right path.

Today we are going to hear about how Jesus not only did this for His disciples but how He does this for His people today. When we feel all out of gas, or when our tanks are $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$ or even $\frac{3}{4}$ full Jesus is present to fill us up and recharge our batteries and give us a new start.

The first thing that Jesus does to refill your tank when you're running on empty and feeling drained is He meets you where you are. The disciples were scared to death that the religious authorities in Israel might find them and give them the same sentence as Jesus. They were locked behind closed doors so no one could get to them. But this did not stop Jesus from coming to them. In His resurrected body He came and stood among them. The locked door did not stop Him. He met them where they were.

Friends, God Himself is present even in the most difficult times. Even if at times it seems that your prayers are bouncing off the ceiling, He is here. He is present and He is working out all things for the good of those who love Him, as Romans 8 says.

Have you ever in your life run out of gas while driving? Do you ever see how far you can go after the “gas” light comes on? The circumstances in our life can quickly drain the gas from our tanks. We may be full of hope one moment and then when life hits through illness or loss our full tanks may quickly drain. We all need to be more filled. No matter how well things in our life may seem to be going we need to have the fullness of Christ

in our lives. We need His Word to sustain us and be our steady anchor when the storms of life hit hard. For in truth, He is our life and the very air we breathe so to speak. He is the glue that holds us together when things may seem to be falling apart.

When He comes to His distraught people He comes with encouragement. Every movement of God, every action is an action to ultimately bring about good. Even when we are rebuked, when He corrects us for our sins or allows trials to come our way this ultimately is to show us His grace and lead us to seek Him and rely on Him more and more. He said when He came to His disciples in the locked room, "Peace be with you". We see here that the first thing He does is attend to the needs of His disciples. It is as if to say, "Relax friends, take a deep breath. Everything is going to be okay. I'm alive. I'm here." Jesus could have walked into the room and laid into them about their failures. He could have said, "Why did you leave Me? Why did you abandon Me? Where were you?"

Instead, when they were broken He gave them words of encouragement to build them up. He gives them peace and not the peace of the world, not only peace of mind. He gives them peace that is rock-solid. By His shed blood on the cross and resurrection Jesus has brought us peace with God. This means He has given you a relationship with Him that is close and intimate where we know God as our very own Father and we are His children.

In our sin, we are like the disciples in every way. Have we abandoned Christ?; not in a resolute decision perhaps but if we have ever put His will on the back burner while we go ahead and do our own thing, then this is abandonment. If we go to church on Sunday and then forget His Word on Monday then it is deserting His instruction to us. But thanks be to God He is patient with us and calls us again and again each day to walk with Him. Like sheep we have all gone astray and yet Jesus is the Good Shepherd who seeks us out. We do not deserve His goodness but in His love He seeks us out and calls us back to His safe pasture.

It is important to remember that His grace is what keeps us and what draws us closer to Him. It is His grace that calls us to know Him more and more. This is why reading our Bibles and having daily devotions are so very important. This is where He speaks to us and gives us the bread of life that we can chew on, meditate on, and apply to our situations in life.

In our text we see Thomas, who we commonly know as "Doubting Thomas". Even in Thomas' unbelief however, Jesus did not lose patience. Jesus showed Thomas what He went through for him by His death. He invited Thomas to investigate the crime scene so to speak. Jesus invited Thomas to investigate His autopsy. He said, "Put your finger here, and see my hands, and put out your hand, and place it in my side." These were the wounds of His love for Thomas, the disciples and us today. When Jesus shows the disciples the nail prints in His hands and feet, He's not only identifying Himself, He's showing how much He loves them. Jesus Christ died on the cross not just for the disciples or even the world but for you too.

Jesus offered forgiveness to His disciples. He rose to give life to the dead and came to re-energize His disciples by His Word of forgiveness. Two of the biggest things that can drain us emotionally and physically are guilt and resentment. Forgiveness brings refreshment. Make no mistake; you cannot be happy and guilty at the same time. You cannot have joy and have bitterness toward someone at the same time. You cannot have peace with God and at the same time have hatred toward your neighbor. There is a saying that “nursing a grudge is like arguing with a policeman; The more you do it, the worse things get”. It won’t just get worse with our relationship with the person that we might hold a grudge against; it also has a negative effect on our well-being.

A grudge is like a ten tonne burden; it is a stress that eats away the soul and it can even affect the body. The chicken soup remedy for this is the forgiveness available in Christ. And this is why He has come; this is why He has died and risen for us. He gives the peace that we lack by nature. He gives the peace of forgiveness and with this He gives the power to forgive others and let go of the burden of things like grudges. As it is written in the book of First John, “We love because He first loved us.” Friends, let us keep our eyes fixed on our Saviour of love. In Him the power of forgiveness preserves our life and relieves the burdens.

Friends, when we are running on empty, Jesus is present to fill us with His mercy, His strength and His life-giving Word. He fills our empty tank so we can play a part in His work of love. He does this with the forgiveness of sins He gives in the Word and Sacraments. And yet His grace to us must not be idle. Just like someone puts gas in the tank of his car to drive it and use it, and not to have it only sit in the driveway or by the curb. In the same way, Christ fills our spiritual tanks with the Word of His grace so we might grow in love for each other, so we might grow in our faith in Him, and so we might gain a deeper connection with Him and learn to live and love in Him more fully.

He fills us with His Body and Blood, with His Word of grace so we might have the ultimate focus to our lives; He gives a new reason to live. He sets our eyes on the power of His resurrection; He gives an eternal vision to our lives. It does not end with a funeral. Rather, through Jesus’ rising from the dead we know that we have the same destiny and so by dying, in effect, we are born to eternal life.

This gives us purpose and meaning for our life here and now as well. When Jesus said to the Eleven disciples (minus Judas Iscariot), “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” He gave new meaning to their lives. He gave them the greatest challenge, the greatest mission in life, to make disciples and share the Good News of Jesus Christ; to bring people peace with God and a relationship with their Saviour and Heavenly Father, to bring them to the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The church began with these few men and the church today has grown to over 2 billion worldwide. What a blessed and wonder-working mission from God.

The Lord has this same calling for you today. Today Jesus sends us out to lead people to Christ, out of darkness into His marvellous light, to share His love and the Good News of His death and resurrection, even right here in Park Extension, in our

neighbourhoods, in our homes. It is a blessed and rewarding and exciting mission and one to which each of us has been called to play a part.

Friends, indeed, the Lord is present to fill our tanks when we're empty, He is present to give us hope and to set our sights on His resurrection and the resurrection that is also ours through faith. Jesus says to you today what He said to His disciples so many years ago: "Peace be with you".

His resurrection brings this peace; it brings life eternal. His death and resurrection has brought peace with God and this re-energizes the soul; it fills our empty tanks. He fills us not to be fat Christians but to be active and have peace in His grace as we share His love and Good News with the world. Friends, He is with you always and will never leave you. He will always meet you where you are. For in Christ you have the fullness of life. The One who has risen lives to give us a life full of meaning and purpose. His peace be with you and guide you in all that you do to the glory of His holy name. Amen. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.