

**RUNNING ON EMPTY**  
**Mark 6:30-32**

**Saturday Evening Elk Lake Service**  
**June 30, 2012**  
**Pastor Nathan J. Thompson**

Growing up in my family my father was one who always felt that if the gas tank on our car was getting down to half full it was time to fill it up. Needless to say I can never recall my father, or our family, ever running out of gas in our car.

And being a son very much like my father I still find myself filling up our cars with gas when they are around half-full, or at least between a quarter and half-full. In fact, during the spike in gas prices a few months ago it seemed to soften the pain filling up more often. It makes a difference only putting in six or seven gallons than to fill the whole tank at \$3.80 a gallon.

Now the interesting thing when I married Kim is that her family often functioned differently. In fact, her Dad and brothers often saw it as a challenge to see how far they could drive on empty. Needless to say they have many stories of running out of gas at inopportune times.

One time I remember was when Kim and our children were driving out West and we realized that the next gas station was over 60 miles ahead, and the gage was touching empty. Kim, from her background, took this as a challenge I shouldn't worry about. I, of course, was panicked.

When we finally pulled into the station the car seemed to be running on fumes. In fact, it is not a good sign when your car's tank holds like 18 gallons, and you put in 17.8. A close call like this makes me even more committed to filling up earlier.

In life today, of course, there are many comparisons that can be drawn from this illustration. The reality is that more people today are living their lives near empty, or even on fumes, than there are those who are keeping their life-tank full. And many today are literally running out of gas.

The reason for this, of course, is because the pace of our lives, the busyness of all we are involved in, the demands of our work, and the unrealistic expectations we place on ourselves, all have a way of draining all the energy and spirit right out of us. We are often exhausted.

And then add to this the feelings of disappointment we may face, the challenges of the economy and uncertain jobs, along with the difficulties and hard work that are needed in marriage and relationships, and it is easy to feel depressed, negative about life, and hopeless.

One of the important realities is to know that the Bible has a great deal to say about these issues. In fact, Jesus himself was often faced with times in his life when he was tired, when his energy was depleted, when he didn't have much to give to others.

Our Scripture reading for this evening from Mark 6:30-32 tells about how Jesus tried to get away from the crowds to a solitary place—kind of like what you campers might be doing here at Elk Lake. In fact, he went by boat so the people couldn't directly follow. Ah, but it says that the crowd ran ahead so they could meet him in this new place.

The challenge Jesus had, as his reputation for healing and sharing compassion to others was spreading, was to periodically get away from this chaos. As much as he loved and cared for the people Jesus needed time for prayer to his Father, for listening to God, and for simple rest.

Jesus shows by example that even he, the son of the most high God, needed time to refuel and refill his spirit. Without some spiritual and physical renewal he wasn't much good to others. Jesus needed to go apart to a quiet place before his life came apart in emptiness.

And the same thing is true for you and me. In order for us to do our jobs well, to be loving spouses and parents to our children, to give the best of ourselves to serving others, we need to have our physical and spiritual tanks refilled. It is impossible if we are running on empty.

So what does it take to fill us up and make us whole? Well, it is here that we can easily get our priorities and ways of trying to get filled messed up. It is easy to be tempted by the wrong fuel, to put our efforts in the wrong places, and to end up even more empty than before.

A few years ago Tom Brady of the New England Patriots, one of the most highly paid and successful quarterbacks to ever play the game, was interviewed by 60 Minutes' journalist, Steve Kroft. Despite the fame and career accomplishments he had achieved already Brady told Kroft that it felt like something was still lacking in his life. He said:

"Why do I have three Super Bowl rings and still think there's something greater out there for me? I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, 'Hey man, this is what (it's about).' I've reached my goal, my dream, my life. Me? I think, 'It's got to be more than this.' I mean this isn't—this can't be—all it's cracked up to be....there are a lot of other parts about me I'm trying to find."

This message of Tom Brady, of course, is being echoed countless times by people who are very successful and wealthy, as well as more normal folks like us just trying to live each day. Increasing numbers of people are running on empty in their personal and spiritual lives.

An unknown author said, "Our greatest fear should not be of failure, but of succeeding at something that doesn't really matter."

The truth we need to remember is that the promises of this world can never adequately fill us up. Success, fame, wealth, sport's trophies, a comfortable retirement—none of these things can fill us up. Oh, they may make us feel full and satisfied periodically, but that is always fleeting.

For when your investments tank, or you are a has-been in sports, or when your comfortable life is racked by ill-health or death, these things offer nothing to fill your emptiness. That is why many people in these challenging times are feeling depleted. Trusting the promises of this world is always hopeless.

Therefore, the only one who can fill up your emptiness is our God through Jesus Christ. Only Jesus can fill your spirit with hope, love, and a peace that passes all understanding. Only Jesus can fill you with a purpose to serve others. And only Jesus, and his love, never fails.

Jesus says in Matthew 6:33, "*But seek first his kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be given you as well.*" In other words, if you want to keep life in the right perspective you need to put Jesus' kingdom first. Like Jesus you need to spend time in worship, study, service.

Remember the response of Jesus to the Samaritan woman at the well? *“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”*

Jesus offers his life giving water to each person who will receive and trust him by faith. Jesus offers his refueling to those who will put his kingdom first—will worship him faithfully, will pray to him regularly, will study his Word with openness. Jesus can fill you to overflowing.

My friend, how is your life today? Are you running on empty? Are you feeling tired and worn out by the challenges of life? Are you feeling a lack of energy with your kids, or your spouse, or your friends, and are you more short and angry with them? Is your spirit depleted in dealing with the economic challenges in your work or home?

Be assured, my friend, that Jesus calls you to come with him and get away from the crowd. He calls you to be still and know that he is God. He calls you to change your priorities, to put him first, so that he can keep filling you up with his Spirit and love. Make sure you come apart before your life comes apart.