

†**Reading from the Epistles:** 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Fill 'er up?

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Gas prices are on the rise again. But it really doesn't seem to matter to most folks. I mean, yes, we don't like paying more at the pump for a gallon of gas, but we Americans just don't want to give up the joy and the freedom of being able to go anywhere we want to go in our cars. It's in our genes.

Cars have always been marketed with the theme of endless freedom on the road. So, we're willing to put up with higher prices. We're even willing to sometimes get in a long line when there are shortages or to drive 50 miles just to save two cents a gallon. We accept those times as challenges and nothing is going to get between me and my steering wheel! So, as long as there are gas pumps to be pumped, we're going to keep right on filling up our cars.

Have you ever thought about the church being like a gas station? I mean, wouldn't it be great if our church was as popular as the filling station down on the corner... a place where people just had to come because we had something they couldn't live without?

It's not so farfetched as it sounds, because you know what... I believe we do have something people can't live without. Keep the image of gas pumps here at the church in your mind as we listen to our reading from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 9, verses 6-15.

There something very special and really wonderful about the filling station here at Columbia. No, we don't pump gas, but we do offer something much better. Because if we had pumps out in front of the church, they would all be pumping out the same thing: the best and most pure gift can find anywhere. Those pumps would be flowing with the grace of Jesus Christ.

You see, Columbia Presbyterian Church is very much like a filling station. But not like the stations you find today out on the road where you have to get out of your car to fill up your own tank. No... our filling station is more like those filling stations of an era gone by. How many of you remember full-service gas stations?

Yeah... I do, too. You could drive up to the pump, and an attendant would come out to your car and ask you what grade of gas you wanted and ask you, "fill er' up?" Then you'd get your oil checked and even your windshield wiped off. If you had a tire a bit low on air, the attendant would even take care of that. It was amazing.

But slowly, over time, those stations began to disappear... one at a time. The personal touch was lost. Now it's just you and your car. But here at Columbia, you might just say that we're still a full service station, sort of like what Paul said in his letter to the Corinthians: "God can pour on the blessings in astonishing ways so that you're ready for anything and everything, more than just ready to do what needs to be done. God gives you something you can then give away, which grows into full-formed lives, robust in God."

What do you suppose that is? What is it that we receive and give away here at Columbia at our full service station? Well, quite simply, we *receive* God's grace and we *give* God's grace. And unlike the world's supply of oil and gas, God's grace never runs out and it doesn't cost a single penny!

Can you believe that we receive God's grace, God's unconditional love, God's hope and compassion, God's salvation, God's blessings... we receive the bread of life and the cup of salvation, and we don't have to do anything or pay one red cent to receive it. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound! And though it is totally without cost, when grace gets under your skin, you can't help but to respond to it. All Christians do.

When you have been blessed it's only natural to reach out and bless someone else. And when that happens, lives get changed... walls come down, new relationships are made, hungry children get fed, homeless families find hope, brokenness is healed, hurts are soothed, pain is shared, grief is never experienced alone, joy is expressed, and we grow together as a community, united in the love and grace of our Savior.

You see, lives are being changed here at Columbia. Each one of us came to Columbia, this spiritual service station, for a reason. Without a doubt, I'm pretty sure God had something to do with it. Some of you are here because this has been your church home for as many years as you can remember and it was the place you wanted to grow in your faith and raise your family in the love of God and your roots are quite deep. Some of you have just recently started attending Columbia because you were searching for a new church home. Some of you are students or visiting scholars from Columbia or Agnes Scott and are far from home. Some of you might even be here because you are hurting, maybe emotionally, maybe physically... and you are in need of healing. We all have a story. We are all on a faith journey that has brought us here.

Now I'm going to take a bit of a chance this morning that some of you might be willing to share just a few words about your own faith story here at Columbia... a story of how God's grace found you here. Maybe it's a story about what brought you here, something that changed your life, that helped you discover a deeper spiritual connection with the world around you. Maybe there is something going on right now in Columbia Presbyterian Church that fills you with excitement. Or you may have a little story about someone here who nurtured you in the faith that you would like to share. If so, would you be willing now to share your story with us, just briefly, to witness to the power of God's amazing love and grace at this wonderful spiritual service station?

...Personal Testimonies of the People...

Thank you for sharing. As you can tell, we've been pumping a lot of grace at this service station. It just flows so freely. And because everything we have is in reality from God, we, who have been blessed become a blessing to others. Once again, it's that natural response. After all, that's what stewardship is really about... becoming a blessing to others.

And now, once again, we have an amazing opportunity to respond to God's blessings this morning . By supporting this church here at the corner of Kirk and Columbia with our time , with our talents, and with our money. This church... this spiritual full service station is here only because of you and your generous support.

As we just heard last week and today, we provide so many important resources to both our members and to our neighbors. And now each of us has the opportunity to keep that happening by sharing our blessings with others.

So the question is... and only you can answer it, what is God calling you to do this morning? What is God calling you to give to support Columbia Presbyterian Church's mission? Is this church and its mission worth making a generous sacrifice of your time and in the sharing of your talents? Are you willing to give something up to take a risk to increase your annual pledge and see what God will do with your gift? As you consider your tithe that you will present in just a few moments, remember that with God all things are possible. That's the pure essence of grace. Grace is that stuff that fills our lives when we're not looking. Grace is God's unconditional love that overwhelms us when we feel we're the most unworthy. Grace provides us with the hope that what is impossible for us to achieve is possible for God. And grace is the stuff of the Holy Spirit that fills us with such awe and wonder that we respond to God with words of love and acts of compassion and the tithing of our money... not for any reward, but just because... just because God loved us first.

Welcome to Columbia Presbyterian Church. Fill 'er up?

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.