**Empty Means Empty! (Sermon)**

**Sermon (FCC)**

**July 1, 2018**

**Greetings**

**The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**Thank you to our senior pastor Jonathan Hall** for providing me the opportunity to bring the message on this Sunday morning. **Also to the congregation** here at First Christian Church Colorado Springs, as well as my dear friends and family who are present. **And as always a special thanks** to my wife and companion for life, who tomorrow will celebrate her birthday. **Above all else I give thanks** to God for yet another day on this sacred journey we are all a part of, which is quite simply, life.

**Introduction**

**In preparation for this morning’s sermon** I meditated quite a bit on just what it is that I wanted to share with you in consideration of the times’ that we are presently living in. **I pondered for a** couple of weeks the title that I would have for this sermon and after going through many more iterations than I had intended, I finally settled on the title: “Empty means Empty.”

**For myself it took a long** period of time before I truly understood what the purest definition and reality of the term empty, really meant. **So I’ll share a story** that somewhat illustrates how I came to fully understand what it means to be empty.

**Thirty-two years ago** next month Shari and I after only being married a few months, embarked on the first leg of our journey together as we departed Colorado in rout to Tacoma, Washington, for my first assignment after graduating Air Force pilot training in Columbus, Mississippi. **Shari was eager to go,** so we packed our belongings into my 1983 Ford Thunderbird, which of course was turbocharged. **Understandably as a brand new** Air Force pilot it was expected that my car move almost as fast as my airplane. **We said goodbye** to our families and set off on this new life as a married couple, in my lightening fast car, headed north and west on the interstate freeways that would take us to our new home. **And yes I was** driving because after all it was my car.

**It was a little late in the afternoon,** yet we were making good time as we traveled north on Interstate 25. **And after driving** many hours and almost three hundred miles, we stopped in Casper Wyoming for a restroom break and to get a little something to eat. **Returning to the car** I drove past a slew of gas stations in Casper now headed for Sheridan Wyoming. **Sitting in the passenger** seat, Shari started giving me strange looks as I merged back onto the freeway. **She mentioned that we had** less than half a tank of gas; however, I assured her that as an Air Force pilot I fully understood the concept of fuel burn. **And I did,** because we safely arrived in Sheridan after dark, parking at the hotel we would spend the night in. **Before getting out of my Thunderbird** I checked the fuel gage and after traveling four hundred plus miles it showed a little less than empty. **Perfect, but according** to my calculations, a car that holds 20.9 gallons of gas and according to the manufacture gets 25 highway miles to the gallon, I should be able to travel at least 500 miles on a single tank. **Therefore I reasoned that I** and not the gas gauge were more accurate. **So in the morning we gathered** ourselves and climbed back into the car. **I passed the first gas station** in Sheridan; however, Shari would not let me pass the second. **Not wanting to end** our marriage so soon, I agreed, stopped and filled the car up with gas.

**For years I drove** my Thunderbird and every other car I owned knowing that I could go just below empty on the gauge without a problem. **Then came the winter of 2001** after we had moved back to Colorado. **I had borrowed my brother**-**in-law’s** small GMC pickup truck since one of our vehicles was in the shop. **Now working for FedEx,** after being away from home for a week, I arrived at Denver International Airport. **I got into the truck** noticing that the fuel gauge was a little above empty. **Understanding how fuel gauges worked** I headed out passing the airport gas station and then south onto E-470 to take the short twenty two mile ride home where I would fill up at my exit.

**As I got within two miles** of the exit, the fuel gauge hit empty and I said to myself “no problem.” **At that moment** the truck started to decelerate. **And, at that point** I said to myself “you have got to be kidding me.” **I coasted to the side** of the road and turned the key in the ignition believing this to only be a temporary setback. **No luck.** **But the gauge only said empty,** not less than empty, as I had been accustomed to. **Who manufactures** a car that actually quits running when the fuel gauge shows empty? **A bit embarrassed** I took out my basic cell phone to call home and have Shari come get me. **To my dismay there was** no answer and nor did she answer my distress call to her basic cell phone. **In 2001 not very** many vehicles traveled on E-470 because of how expensive the toll was, and still is. **So I had to venture along** the freeway on a dark, lonely and cold night, walking the two miles to our home. **Also, in those days** since it wasn’t built up in the area, I was concerned about any raddle snakes or coyotes that might be watching and waiting to pounce. **After walking the harrowing** two miles, I made it home. **Shari was still** not home so I couldn’t share the dreadful adventure I had been through and the fact she wasn’t there when I was in my deepest time of need. **Sitting at home** alone trying to warm myself up, I came to the realization that “Empty Means Empty.”

**Definition**

**As Christians we occasionally** speak of sacrificing or emptying ourselves in the service of God and our Lord Jesus Christ. **Yet if we are honest,** what we really do is adjust our gauge to show empty as being a place where we ensure we have enough to still have something left over and not quite have to give and therefore sacrifice, everything of ourselves.

**Today we live in a world** where the plight of many of our sisters and brothers is becoming by the day more dangerous and dehumanizing. **We have witnessed** the tragedy of children being separated from their parents on the southern border of our nation. **Equally tragic is the rise** in the number of girls, young women and even boys, who are being trafficked across this nation for purposes of fulfilling the criminal sexually deviant desires of men and even some women.

**The racial divide** in our nation has grown to the point where talk persist that perhaps the best way to live is divided and thus to purposely remain within our own tribes, choosing not to even want to consider welcoming someone who is quote-unquote, “different.” **Undergirding this tragedy** is a truth that too many of us do not even want to seek out and create relationships with anyone who doesn’t fit our norm or belong to our tribe.

**High school students across** America are petitioning to vote at an age even younger than eighteen because in part they believe no one is listening to or identifying with their pain as they enter schools each day concerned that an active shooter might be in their midst. **Our politics** and the way we speak to one another if we hold different beliefs on a particular issue is so volatile that many see physical alteration and violence as being the only acceptable remedy to the resolution of one’s disagreements. **I believe that** you get the picture, so I wont go on and on.

**Depth**

**I will go out on a limb** and say we are all familiar with today’s scriptures taken out of the books of John and Philippians, giving insight into what it truly looks like for one to empty oneself on the behalf of others. **Jesus in his own words** in John 15 states: “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” **And in Philippians 2** the Apostle Paul instructs that we: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. **Rather, in humility** value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” **You see this is what** it looks like to empty oneself on behalf of the greater part of humanity. **Empty means empty,** everything, in other words nothing is left.

**Both Paul as a martyr** and Jesus upon the cross completely emptied themselves on behalf of you and I as well as our brothers and sisters who live around us, whether or not we acknowledge their existence. **Surly these examples** of emptying oneself are extreme and far from what anyone in these modern times would do or would be expected to do. **After all,** when we empty ourselves don’t we become vulnerable to that which is lurking and looking for an opportunity to pounce? **Perhaps not and perhaps** emptying ourselves is really about how we choose to live in relationship to one another.

**Modern examples** of individuals emptying themselves run the gambit. **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.,** who while sick and completely exhausted committed himself to the plight of the Black sanitation workers in Memphis Tennessee, giving his “I’ve Been to the Mountain Top” speech on April 3, 1968. **Then as we know,** on the following day was assassinated as he stood with his lieutenants on the balcony of Memphis’s Lorraine Motel.

**Another is,** the mother who even today sacrifices her safety and well being so that her children will have food to eat and a warm place to sleep if be only for a night. **Both are examples** of what it means to empty oneself to the greater humanity.

**You and I** are not Dr. King, Mahatmas Gandhi, Mother Teresa, or probably not also a desperate mother living in and out of homeless shelters. **Still, we are to** lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters, valuing them above ourselves. **How do** we do that? **How do we empty** ourselves in order to benefit those who share this space with us?

**Examine Beliefs**

**First, I would posit** that we must from the depths of our hearts examine what we really believe our responsibility to be as Christians. **Do we believe that** it is tragic for children in immigrant and refugee families to be separated from their mothers and fathers? **If so then perhaps** we need to travel to the southern border offering some sort of physical assistance. **And if we can’t** travel to the border then being part of a local ministry, which supports those affected, as well as continuing to educate ourselves on the issues, might be a way to start to empty oneself.

**We might not initially** recognize human trafficking but on the occasions when we do come across a girl, boy or young woman who is obviously being abused, we must not only say something but also look to do the work to be able to take them in. **If not into our** own homes, then into a safe place where they are not simply dropped off, but where we are present with them for as long as is necessary.

**The color of our skin** should not divide us nor should the truth be ignored of how pigmentation was and is still used even today, to create animosity and divisions among cultures and communities. **Facing the truth** about our past requires that those whose privilege whether realized or perceived, as being the result of past atrocities, that they be emptied to whatever it takes to heal hurts and create a new community. **Division should be** taught in the math class and not in our homes, schools, government, social organizations or churches.

**Emptying ourselves requires** that we literally stand not with, but between our children and anything, which has the potential to do them harm. **On every occasion with** the nonprofit group serving youth that I am a part of, I tell them that it is my and all of the other adult volunteers responsibility to give them all of who we are. **That when they** depart our presence, we the volunteers should be exhausted or quite simply, empty. **There should never** be an expectation that our youth do what we are charged with doing as adults on behalf of our children as is instructed in scripture.

**Christ was very specific** in his words that all are welcome so emptying ourselves to one another in this volatile atmosphere means that differing ideologies does not have to have the last word. **For as Dr. King** once said: "We must learn to live together as brothers or we will all perish together as fools." **Never should political** differences be a reason for verbal, psychological or physical violence. **It is not the way** of the Christian or those espousing the values we say honor all of humanity.

**In Isaiah 1,** the Prophet’s words read that we should: “Learn to do right; seek justice. **Defend** the oppressed. **Take up the cause** of the fatherless; (and) plead the case of the widow.” **Quite simply,** as individuals, and as a community of believers, we need to empty ourselves.

**Closing**

**Today I drive a** seventeen-year-old SUV that doesn’t quite get the mileage of my long parted with Ford Thunderbird with the turbocharged engine. **I have never run out** of gas and normally don’t let the fuel gauge get even close to empty. **The catch 22** in all of this of course is that if we are empty then we are finished and therefore, ultimately of no use or value to anyone. **That’s not true.** **For when we empty** ourselves to humanity, it can and will be harrowing; however, we create the vessel for Christ to again, over and over, fill us with his Spirit in order that we can continue to empty ourselves until the last breadth.

**So as I travel this land** as well as other corners of our planet, I look forward and commit to even more so, surface the opportunities where I might be able to empty myself. **My prayer is that** we together will empty ourselves for each other, but first do so for the least of our sisters and brothers, just as Christ upon the cross, emptied himself for us because, “Empty Means Empty.”

1. Psalm 19:1 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)