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While driving on vacation, there's something we all have in common that we have to do along the way, which is...? (*bathroom, eat, etc.*) We also all have to get gas for our cars, for without taking time to fill up we won't get very far on our trips. And in today's economy with climbing gas prices, how many of you try and find the least expensive gas while driving through a town, maybe even trying to save a few pennies per gallon?

Now it's even easier to find the best gas price with an app on smart phones that searches for all the nearby gas stations and displays the price at each station. While driving through Indiana last week we used the gas app to find the best price and discovered that if we drove into a small town just across the Illinois state line we could get gas about 30 cents less than anywhere else.

We knew we had enough gas to reach the station, unlike Edward who wrote in *Reader's Digest* about his friend who was notorious for waiting until the needle was on empty before filling up his gas

tank. Finally his car died, and they had to push the car to the nearest filling station. After his friend finished pumping the gas, the attendant asked if he had learned anything. "Yeah. I learned I have a 15-gallon tank."¹ It might have been better had he learned to not wait until the last minute to get gas!

In our case last week, when we arrived at the gas station suggested by our smart phone, I could tell that others must have been using a similar method of finding the best price, for long lines of cars were waiting at the station. When Staci inquired in the station about the reason for the low gas price, the cashier explained that the two stations in town were competing by continually lowering their prices to outdo the neighboring station. It appeared their station was winning, for the station across the street had two or three cars in comparison to the long lines of the station we visited.

No matter what the price of gas, we all have the same thing in common: we have to fill up. But that also applies to our spiritual lives as well, for

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sometimes we find ourselves feeling as though we are running on empty. Wouldn't it be handy if we had a spiritual gas gauge that indicated when we were about ready to run out of energy so we knew when to fill up?

How many times have you identified with the words we read in our call to worship? "We know that the whole creation is groaning together and suffering labor pains up until now. We ourselves who have the Spirit also groan inside as we wait." Anyone ever groaned or felt empty? Those words come from a portion of a biblical letter written to the church in Rome. It sounds as though the writer knew what it felt like to be running out of gas while waiting for something to happen.

The writer continued: "The Spirit comes to help our weakness. We don't know what we should pray, but the Spirit pleads our case with unexpressed groans." How many times have you felt that way: unsure of even how to start a prayer?

I imagine Jesus' disciples experienced this confusing and uncertainty about how to pray after he had died. About seven weeks after Jesus had died, his friends gathered for the Pentecost celebration, which was a Jewish agricultural festival that not only celebrated the harvest but also celebrated the gift of God's teachings, known as the Torah.

It was a joyous celebration, but I imagine Jesus' friends didn't feel much like a party. It takes time to mourn the loss of someone you love, and although they had experienced Christ's resurrection, he was no longer with them. It's hard to imagine the mixture of hope and sadness they experienced as they gathered in a room in a city that was filling with visitors who traveled from far away to attend the Pentecost celebration in Jerusalem.

I imagine they felt as though they had just about run out of gas, which we often feel in the church even today, don't we? Sometimes we find ourselves watching the gas gauge move toward

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empty, and rather than filling up we begin to panic. We see the gas gauge of attendance and we wonder why others are not here. Or we see our struggling financial records and wonder where all the money has gone. Some choose just to walk away, not wanting to face the potential empty gas gauge. Others may react and take out their frustrations on the church, saying unkind things to one another.

How many would like to remain in this kind of situation, watching the gas gauge head toward empty?

If that's not our vision, we could do what Jesus' friends did on that Pentecost event almost 2000 years ago—they filled up with the energy of the Spirit. The writer of the book of Acts describes their experience as tongues of fire dancing over their heads, and as a great wind blowing through the room.

It's as though they opened the windows and experienced a breath of fresh air, which filled them up with hope and a vision to keep going. They ran

out into the streets and began telling others what they had experienced. Some viewed their excitement as intoxication, as though they had been drinking wine early in the morning.

Peter, who was one of those who had been in the room, began explaining that they were filled with God's Spirit. He quoted the ancient prophet Joel who had said that God would pour out God's Spirit to inspire the old and the young to see visions and experience dreams.

And I have seen that hope in the church today; for I have heard you express your dreams and visions for not only this congregation, but for God's broader church. During our casting and catching event last month, wonderful ideas were envisioned. And now various groups are sorting through those ideas to sense where the Spirit is nudging us.

For example, I heard Cathy say at that meeting, "my vision is for our church, growth. It doesn't sound like a big word, but the impact would be profound. But to attain growth, here comes the bad

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word, we need change. As human beings we do not like change. We are content. We want to live in our individual worlds that stay exactly the same from day to day.”

Can you imagine what would have happened if Jesus’ friends had decided to ignore the Spirit and avoid the changes that were dancing around them? What if they had decided to stay in that room and not venture into the streets? Or what if they had said, “I’m running on empty, so I think I’ll just stay home today”?

I am grateful they followed the nudge of the Spirit and went into the streets; we sometimes call

this event the birthday of the church, for many were inspired to join this new and exciting movement. They may have felt as though they were on empty, but the Spirit filled them up with a sense of hope, with a vision that God was still moving in the world. May you find this same hope as you fill up here on Sunday morning. When the world around you seems to be in chaos, when funds or time or enthusiasm seem to be running on empty, may you tap into the energy of the Spirit that continues to echo on this Pentecost Sunday.

¹ Edward Hyatt, “Running Out of Fuel,” *Reader’s Digest*, rd.com.