

“Fill ‘er up” – does anybody remember that phrase? I remember my parents saying it, but by the time I started driving, self-service at gas stations had become the standard means of fueling. I actually thought I would never say “Fill ‘er up” until I went to seminary in New Jersey, one of only two states in which self-service gas is against the law. It was a very strange feeling to sit in my car while someone else did the work, and a few times I stepped out of my car and went to the pump before I realized that I could be sited for something that I took for granted, but eventually it became second nature to sit, wait, and let another hand do the filling.

That memory of buying gas in New Jersey struck my mind as I prepared my thoughts for this communion. Actually, what came to mind was the ancient Latin phrase “Horror Vacui,” Aristotle’s principle of physics that is translated as “Nature abhors a vacuum.” Later, scientists rejected Aristotle’s principle through experimentation, but it is still apparent as we continue to observe the physical universe that a vacuum has a way of being filled. One of the best examples is creation itself – we have an expanding universe, and for we who believe, that expansion is very consistent with God’s actions.

The story of Genesis begins with a void that is filled by the divine engineering of the universe. When the earth is created, it is vacant until the word of God begins to fill it with life. And do we remember the words that God commanded of the first humans in the book of Genesis? “Be fruitful and multiply.” That theme of filling a void continues, not just through the Biblical stories of creation, but it appears in the earliest laws of the Hebrews and later, the same theme is echoed by the prophets, with one distinct difference.

While the laws of the Jewish religion spoke of filling and renewal as a physical or legal precept, the prophets only spoke of an inner type of fulfillment – a spiritual promise that

was linked directly to the coming of God's Messiah. Jesus of Nazareth embraced those prophetic images as descriptive of his nature and his purpose, and descriptive of the nature of sin. In Jesus' teachings, the purpose of the law is to rid ourselves of sin, but Jesus declares that the vacuum the law creates - once we rid ourselves of sin - will be filled once again with sin, unless we find the means to replace it with a new reality – a new reality which sin cannot take from us no more than we can empty the universe. We cannot obtain this new reality – it can only be given to us as a gift through the death and resurrection of the Son of God.

At the end of the gospel of Matthew, we see the fruits of that gift as Jesus commands a new creation, with an image as familiar to us as God's creation of the earth or God's command to humanity to be fruitful and multiply: "Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"

Jesus understood that our call to fill the earth with the knowledge of God's saving love could not be accomplished without our constant replenishment of God's grace, and so he gave us the gift of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper – a place where we come to empty ourselves of sin and despair, and fill the vacuum with forgiveness, commitment, and purpose. That is why our gathering at the table is not just a remembrance or a memorial,

but a genuine encounter with the Holy Spirit of Christ that transforms and re-energizes our faith.

When we come to the table, we are saying to our Lord and God “Fill us up,” because we cannot do it for ourselves. Humanity has tried to fill the emptiness of life and the inevitability of death with many means of self-fulfillment, but no matter how full we may be, the nature of humanity and the nature of creation finds a way to empty our hearts. But at this table, God fills us with the unquenchable Holy Spirit, eternally joining us to God’s divine purpose. So let us come this morning to the Supper, to empty ourselves of the darkness that we may be filled with light of Christ, and shine for the world.