Dear family IN and of GRACE,

A while back, my lawnmower ran out of gas. No matter how much I would have pushed it or stared at it or yelled at it, it would have just sat there not doing anything. Here, then, is my theory of lawnmowers: It is impossible for a lawnmower to be a lawnmower without fuel. And here is a corollary to that theory: It is impossible for a lawnmower to fuel itself. As it turns out, I was right – the lawnmower was ready to act like a lawnmower again once I put gas in its tank.

It is very difficult for us, as Christians, to be who we are if we are out of fuel. One of the great things about our Sunday morning and seasonal mid-week worship services is that God is present to provide us with His fuel for living and serving. We call that fuel His “means of grace” – the means by which He delivers His grace to us so that we can be who we are.

It begins each day as we remember our baptisms. In our baptisms, God acted to connect us to Himself by water and Word as He delivered His name to us. Those who bear His name belong to Him**. By His action in our baptisms we were united with Jesus and given all of the benefits of His life, death, and resurrection**. So, as we gather in worship and devotions to remember our baptisms, we are remembering that our life with God began because of His action. Since we are His, we get to live like we are His.

The problem is that we still carry around these internal desires that are telling us to live for ourselves. Yes, in our baptisms our sin was completely forgiven, but that didn’t make us any less sinful. And so we struggle daily to drown the old self -centered, self-gratifying nature so that the new God-centered, other-focused person can rise up. But on our own, we just can’t do it.

So God gives us more! Here comes the faithful work of the Holy Spirit in HIS Word, Sacraments, in public worship services, spiritual educational programs, and our private devotions …

He delivers that “more” through His Word and Jesus’ Supper. Whenever His Word is shared, we are confident that the Holy Spirit is present to draw us closer to God. In that Word we are pointed to God’s boundless love for us in Jesus, and we are shown how we can respond to that love by living His way. Whenever Jesus’ Supper is shared, God delivers Jesus to us very intimately with the bread and the wine for the forgiveness of our sins and to assure us that He is present with us always. In a very real sense, God keeps delivering the fuel we need to be who we are – His people, set apart to point others to Him.

Fueled by God’s boundless love in Christ, then, we follow Christ, and love others to life in Christ.

Jesus said, “**I** **am** **the** **vine**; you are **the** branches. Whoever abides **i**n me and **I** **i**n him, he **i**t **i**s that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5) Looking forward to celebrating and GROWING IN AND AT GRACE with you often!

Pastor GJ Carstens