

Still Learning
June 25, 2008

It is tempting when writing and speaking regularly to do it in such a way as to make myself look good. Unfortunately, I find that I learn the most not when I do something well, but when I screw up. Sometimes my screw-ups are down right embarrassing.

One of those happened recently. I had gone to the hospital on a Sunday afternoon. Rarely do I go on a Sunday, but there were people I really wanted to see. So, I left my family and my extended family visiting at the house to run in to the hospital in downtown Madison. I decided that I would ride my new motorcycle. It was exciting for me to ride the motorcycle into Madison to visit the hospital.

This is the very first motorcycle I have ever owned. I am 45 years old and I have wanted one all of my life. Over the last two months, I have been really enjoying riding and getting to know what it means to be an owner of a motorcycle.

As I was on my way home, the ride was going well until the cycle started to run rough (which caught my attention) then it died. I was so surprised. This is a new motorcycle with 300 miles on it. What was going on?

I waited a while. I even checked the gas and there seemed to be some in there. Finally, it started again. I got about three miles closer to home and it ran rough again, then died. There it stayed. I was bummed.

I was able to get it pushed into a yard (with permission of the owner of the house). When I got back home, family and friends were wondering how I was doing and I was just bummed. Something was wrong with my motorcycle and I didn't know what it was.

The next day I was able to contact the company I bought it from. We made arrangements for them to come and pick it up and look at it. It was just a short time after they had it that I got a phone call. It was from the head of the service department who told me they couldn't find anything wrong with it and that it was running well. He did however, inform me that "the gas was quite low and now it was on reserve".

I was embarrassed. I had run my motorcycle out of gas. I felt so silly. I felt so foolish. Partly because so many people had asked me, "does it have gas?" At one point I even responded to my wife saying, "I just wish people would quit asking me that question."

Now, the truth was that I had run my motorcycle out of gas. I was embarrassed. For those of you who may not be familiar with motorcycles, many do not have a gas gage (mine does not). Nor do most models of Honda (which I have), have a little light that goes on to say, "You are really low on gas." Which by the way, I kept waiting for a little light.

But, I had run my motorcycle out of gas. I was embarrassed.

Yet in the process I learned something. I learned how my motorcycle acts when the gas is low and when I need to switch it to the reserve tank and find my way to a gas station. I have also learned that I am not the first person to run out of gas. Others have learned this lesson before me. I strongly suspect I will not be the last person to run out of gas.

As many practical lessons do, this one also got me reflecting on my faith. I realized how easy it is to not only run my motorcycle out of gas, if I am not careful. But I am mindful of how easy it is to run out of gas spiritually too, if I am not careful. It is easy to get so caught up in the ride of life that I end up not paying attention to what is important.

When I neglect things that help me connect with God, disciplines like taking time to pray, read scripture, worship publicly and privately, when I neglect these basic tasks, I end up tired and out of gas. These disciplines nurture me and give me energy for life and for work. Without doing them, I get tired and before I know it, I get stranded by the road, waiting for a ride.

As you go through life this week, what is it that you need to do to reconnect with God and fill yourself up? What is it that you need to be doing to nurture yourself and give yourself gas for the journey?

May God help each of us receive what we need for the journey we walk.

In the hope Jesus offers us,
Rev. Scott Carlson

The Mission of Sun Prairie United Methodist Church is to invite and welcome people to be committed and compassionate followers of Jesus Christ through worship, through spiritual growth, through fellowship and through service to others.