

Series: Lent (Feb. 17 - April 4)

Empty

Series Text: Philippians 2:3-11

Blurb: Jesus is many things: our brother and friend, our mediator and our highly exalted King. This Lent however, we will take a look at an ancient account of Jesus as one who came to serve and expend himself for the sake of others. He who possessed all became as one who had nothing. Through this series we consider what Christ's emptying means for us and how it has changed everything.

Wed., Feb. 21: [Pre-recorded and In-person]

Memory Verse: "But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ."
Philippians 3:7

Message: **Empty Life** -Pastor David

Sermon Scripture: Philippians 3:7-12

Reading of Scripture: Psalm 27:1-5

Blurb: Empty is an adjective that describes something without contents. Empty is a verb for removing the contents from something. This Sunday we focus our Lenten journey on emptying our lives of meaningless content so that we can become empty before God. When we are empty before God, then God can fill us with meaning, joy, and victory. So, let's seek an empty life!

[Recorded Worship Beginning]

WELCOME -Pastor Andrew

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor Andrew

"But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ." Philippians 3:7

WORSHIP MUSIC SET -Sanctify

Take My Life and Let It Be

Have It All

[Live Worship Beginning]

GATHERING SONG: *Humble* -Sanctify

WELCOME -Pastor David

Lent! New series: Empty.

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David

"But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ." Philippians 3:7

WORSHIP MUSIC SET -Sanctify*Oh, God**Take My Life and Let It Be**Have It All*

Worship prayer -Pastor Andrew

[Both Recorded & Live Worship]**SCRIPTURE READING: Psalm 27:1-5 (CEB) -Reader:**

In Psalm 27 King David sings about how God is his only hope. God is his single desire. Psalm 27:1-5:

1 The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?

**2 When the wicked advance against me to devour me,
it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall.**

**3 Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear;
though war break out against me, even then I will be confident.**

**4 One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.**

**5 For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock.**

[Live Worship only] PRAYERS & LORD’S PRAYER -Pastor David**[Live Worship only] GROW MOMENT: Grow Groups video -Pastor David****GENERATIONAL BRIDGE -Pastor Andrew****MESSAGE: Empty Life****PP#1: Empty Life**

“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.” Philippians 3:7

Empty. Empty Chair. This past Wednesday we started the season of Lent by putting an empty chair for Jesus in our lives: in our heart, and in each room of our lives. This Lent we are looking to see how Jesus emptied Himself of all His divine benefits (that’s Christmas), and then how He emptied Himself for the purpose of our salvation. Now we are pursuing emptiness like Jesus.

Empty Life. Philippians 3:7, “But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.”

I have to admit, I’m getting a bit bored with the emptiness of entertainment. This past year of social distancing has brought us many hours at home. At first, I reveled in the more relaxed pace, being less busy, less driven. It felt good to slow down, get some better balance, tackle some projects.

Part of that came from less activities and many groups take a pause. Part of it came from the time saved from less travel for meetings and appointments that became virtual. Part of it came from less social interaction and outings with family and friends, and that did not feel good. And part of it came from being able to do less fun stuff, like not eating out, going to movies or concerts, museums, or even shopping.

PP#2: *Image of a frazzled, bloodshot eyed person who has stayed awake all night watching TV.*

I almost didn't notice, really, but I haven't done a really good job of redeeming the time. I have done some projects and I have been able to do some forgotten hobbies, but if I'm honest, the majority of my new free time I've simply frittered away. I've binge-watched multiple seasons of a show in a week, I've watched obscure movies on the Disney Chanel, and I don't think there are any episodes of the Antiques Roadshow's *40 seasons* I have left to see. They just keep playing them, episode after episode, on this wonderful free channel on Pluto TV. I mean, the next episode starts before I manage to get the previous one turned off, and I'm sucked in! It's not my fault! And, my goodness, the ugly stuff that people find valuable! They can keep it!

And all the while the shows play, I'm on my other devices playing internet games and puzzles. There are thousands of them! All free, but with irritating ads I have to keep skipping. Hours slip by as I'm stubbornly pursuing the bronze trophy, or to meet some arbitrary goal for the day. The goal, of course, that turns into a new one tomorrow, and that builds with persistent daily dedication to achieve the all-important reward of...a different background color. For some reason, I'm strangely driven to unlock the reward trunk, even though I know it will only contain three free hints.

PP#3: *Image of a family or group of people all in the same room, each on their own divices.*

I'm going to throw my family under the bus. I do it to show that I'm not the only one! Reese had a day off when I went to work, what was it, MLK Day? I came home and asked her what she did all day. She said she had a great day. She slept in. Putzed around the house. Ate cereal for lunch! Watched a movie, TV and played internet games. Nathan doesn't have this problem He doesn't watch Antiques Roadshow or play Blowkus on his tablet. No. He's much better. He spends his evening earning a new paint job for his virtual race car on his Switch, or unlocking a car that can turn into a submarine in his spy game on his Playstation 4. Yep, we have *quality* "family time" during our free evenings!

I don't think this is just *my* issue. The more I talk to people, the more I hear that this is how most of us are spending our time. We stopped in to see my Aunt Mary when in Jamestown two weekends ago. She said she was having trouble with her tablet. When we looked at it, we discovered that she was running out of memory. She had been spending much of her time doing the paint by number pictures. In just Happy Color alone she had completed over *1,500* pictures! How about you? We are happy to have a slower pace, but without really realizing it, we've filled up our new time with mindless time wasters.

PP#4: *Image of a person bored with options for virtual entertainment (games/shows/etc.)*

And I'm kinda getting a bit bored with it all! The thousands of internet games kinda cluster around similar kinds of activities or objectives, when you look past the different displays and designs. I get irritated at having to skip the ads...*after* 5 seconds, and I hate waiting the four seconds

it takes the game to shuffle and deal. Shows have reoccurring plot lines with similar characters and predictable drama. When we finally watched the last season of *The Mandalorian* recently, I remember thinking to myself, “Really, they couldn’t come up with anything more interesting than this?”

Reality check! I’m *bored* with the most expensive show of all time? Disney has spent more money on each episode than most companies spend on a movie. Top talent, best people working on it, and I’m unimpressed? It’s like the halftime show of the Superbowl by The Weeknd. Largely panned as ho-hum. Really? Dazzling lights, non-stop movement, hosts of dancers, multiple costume changes, and more fireworks than a Fourth of July show. What does it take to impress us anymore?

This last year has been a time of massive indulgence on media stimulation and entertainment. And, I think, we’re getting a bit bored with it all. It’s ultimately unsatisfying. And there seems to be a growing entertainment burnout.

PP#5: *Image for being in a “show hole.”*

Unpack that a bit. Entertainment burnout? *That’s* our struggle? Wow!

And our solution is to seek out new and different forms of entertainment. How I wish I could go out to movies again, go to concerts, museums, shows. I miss big, stadium events, crowd experiences, crowded clubs and bars. (Well, I don’t, but many do.) We want *more*, something *more*.

I’ve really focused on this today because I think this uncovers something telling and important. This past year, if we look, has revealed to us our tendency to pursue the frivolous. We have had the opportunity to indulge in a section of entertainment, and we have found it lacking. This gives us insight into our broader lives. Entertainment doesn’t satisfy. We get caught into wasting time in what simply passes time and keeps us distracted from accomplishing anything meaningful.

PP#6: *Image of a person surrounded by his/her massive collection, say pottery or collectors toys.*

One of the recent episodes of *Antiques Roadshow* had this widow bring in a sampling of her husband’s vast collection of a certain kind of pottery. Now, collecting pottery can be a healthy hobby. But the woman talked about her husband’s obsession with it, spending hours and hours hunting down certain examples, traveling every weekend to shows and thrift stores and flea markets, spending tons of money. He enjoyed collecting it...but now what? She doesn’t care about it. No one else in the family does. She will simply sell it all off. He ended up spending so much of his life, in the end, just shuffling stuff around. Hmmm. You know, I’ve got a couple of collections my kids will simply throw out one day! Are you identifying here with me?

The application here, you can see by now, right? But do we apply it?

PP#7: *The word “Lent” or image of it, and image of garbages filled with a discarded collection.*

This is why we need Lent! We need a calling to stop the routine, a time to notice the ongoing mindless pattern we find ourselves living, and to choose a different way of living. We need an invitation to *embrace empty*.

Jesus calls us to a deeper life, a richer life, a life of meaning and purpose. We aren’t made to drift our way through our days, passing time with endless hours of *Candy Crush*. We’re made for more! And Jesus offers salvation: salvation *from* empty, aimless lives, and salvation *for* full, purposeful lives. Lives emptied of what is junk so they can be filled with treasure.

The first step of this salvation is waking up, becoming self aware of how our lives are drifting. We've just done that, Wednesday and today. But the next step is key. We can be informed and self aware and still spend the entire afternoon painting by number. It's choosing to empty our lives of what is empty. It's putting our pass times in their right balance.

We call that repentance. It's giving up what's hurting us. *This* is what Jesus asks of us. Let go of what's keeping you down, distracted, impotent. So often the idea of "surrender" seems so painful. Yet, in Lent, we see it is really getting rid of what's bad for us, so we can have what is good.

PP#8: Philippians 3:7-12 (CEB)

7 But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in [or of] Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

Let's go to our Scripture for today. It's Philippians 3. The previous chapter is our Scripture text for our Empty series, for all of Lent. Paul teaches us to be like Jesus, who emptied His life in order to bring salvation for us. We receive this salvation when we, too, empty our lives to make capacity for what He offers us. And Paul then gives us his own personal testimony of reflecting on his life, and all the junk he has filled it with. Chapter 3, starting with verse 7:

"7 But whatever were gains to me [what he thought was important to get, to accrue in life, to stock up on, to spend time on] I now consider loss [junk, waste] for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith."

We fill our lives with junk that doesn't satisfy. It distracts us from our relationship with Jesus: choosing Him and living for Him. Yet, when Paul takes a good, Lenten look at his life, he sees that everything else he spends his time on, what he strives to accrue or accomplish, looks like garbage when compared to Christ. He willingly and happily loses it all, emptying them out, so that he can be filled with a life lived for Jesus.

Even the good things we think we can do—being a good person, doing good for others, making the world better, all the things we do outwardly to create meaning inside of ourselves—don't make us right. We may think we're filling our time with doing so much good, but in the end, all we do doesn't fix our inner problem. We are still adrift. Our rightness only comes as a gift from Jesus, which we receive by faith.

PP#9: Philippians 3:7-12 (CEB)

10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of His resurrection and participation in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Let's continue. Verse 10, "I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of His resurrection and participation in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead." Paul is talking about dying to self, here. Dying to pursue whatever feels good or what we want in the moment. He's talking about emptying himself of the incessant seeking more and more. He wants to put his selfish self to death and have resurrection with the new life that Jesus gives. This new life has significance, has meaning, has satisfying fulfillment.

Verse 12, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."

Paul here is a mature Christian. And yet he admits that he does not maintain a singular focus on Jesus. He finds himself getting distracted into pass times, piling up stuff that doesn't last. But here we have our Lenten call: to press on to take a hold of the fulfilled life that Jesus offers. Jesus takes hold of us and invites us to take hold of him.

PP#10: Empty

Noun: a container left empty of contents

Adjective: containing nothing, lacking meaning

Verb: to remove all contents

The word "empty" works three ways. As a noun it is used to name something that is empty of contents. After guests leave, you go and pick up "the empties," the empty cans or bottles. Our goal this Lent is to become "an empty." And so, the second way empty works is as a modifier, a word that describes something. The leftover pop cans are *empty* cans, in an *empty* room after the guests leave. This Lent, our goal is to have the word "empty" describe us, empty in terms of worldly filling and focus. When we get to Easter, we'll see how becoming empty to the world makes us able to be filled with the living Jesus, our hope, joy, and victory.

And *to become* empty, we use the word as *a verb*. To empty is the action of removing the contents. That's what we're doing this Lent. How do we do that? As Paul said, we participate with Jesus. We stop participating so completely with this world. Instead, we are conformed to His death. Romans 12:1 says to not be conformed to this world. Instead, we conform to Jesus. We forget what is behind, and we put our focus on Jesus. We keep our eye on the prize.

PP#11: Image for showing fasting from screens.

So, one practice we're going to do together as a church to *empty* is to fast one evening from screens each week from now until Easter. No TV, no video games, no computer games, no social networking, no surfing, no shopping. One evening a week. Try to do it as a household together, if you can. And don't just pick an evening you are already busy! Pick a free evening, an evening you would normally find yourself on a screen. Each Monday morning, starting tomorrow morning, I'll send out a devotional video that will suggest an alternative way to spend the evening. I'll suggest some activities that will foster wholeness, relationships, healing, and restoration. This week I'll suggest we dig out our old photo albums. We observe Lent with prayer and fasting!

PP#12: The "one thing"s of the Bible:

. . . the *one thing* I have desired . . . (Psalm 27:4)

. . . the *one thing* you lack . . . (Mark 10:21)

. . . the *one thing* needed . . . (Luke 10:42)

. . . the *one thing* I know . . . (John 9:25)

Paul says that he lays aside what is behind and focuses on what is ahead. It's a singular focus. The phrase "one thing" occurs a quite a bit in the Bible. Here are a few that can help us.

Psalm 27:4 "The *one thing* I have desired, this *only* do I ask from the Lord: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek Him in His temple."

Mark 10:21, "Jesus looked at [the rich young man] and loved him. '*One thing* you lack,' He said. 'Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.'"

Luke 10:42, Jesus turns to a frantically busy Martha and says, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but there is only *one thing* needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

John 9:25, the blind man that Jesus healed says, "Whether [the One who healed me] is a sinner or not, I don't know. The *one thing* I do know is that I was blind but now I see!"

Jesus has made us able to see. This Lent we choose to focus our seeing on what is needed. We give away all else. We desire only our God.

Empty.

Amen.

[Recorded Worship only] PRAYERS & LORD'S PRAYER -Pastor David

CLOSING SONG: *Fill My Heart*

OFFERING: -Pastor David

-Give of your monies to God's work through this church. You can give in person, mail it in or, most conveniently, you can make an automated transfer or a debit card payment on the church website or by using the "square" on the bulletin.

ANNOUNCEMENTS -Pastor David

Next Sunday: Empty Words -Pastor David

MEMORY VERSE -Pastor David

"But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ." Philippians 3:7

BENEDICTION -Pastor David