

Check the Oil

1 Timothy 1:14

Today I want to talk to you about oil, and maybe even a little bit about grease. Sounds a bit strange, doesn't it?

Growing up on the farm, I was always getting into oil and grease. There were always 3 or 4 large drums of different types of oil in implement garage. There was engine oil for the tractors that ran on regular gasoline and different oil for the diesel tractors. There was a large drum of hydraulic oil and another one for transmissions. Did I mention the kerosene drum for the Nipco heater? Essential fuel for those Wisconsin harsh winters!

And then there was always at least one 5- gallon container of grease sitting around. To a young boy, oil and grease was the magnet, and I was the metal being drawn in for hours of entertainment, smearing it all over my hands and arms much to the dismay of my mother.

But no matter how messy oil can be, it plays a critical part in daily farm operations. We needed clean, new oil in the tractor motors, the hydraulic cylinders, and transmissions. And the old used motor oil was never wasted but used to lubricate all sorts of moving parts from augers to elevators, conveyor chains, barn cleaners, and wheels.

There was always a need to lubricate something with oil or grease. No matter what season it was on the farm, planting or harvesting, I can still see my father standing over some implement pouring oil on this part or greasing the plow blades with an old towel so they wouldn't rust.

Sometimes my job was using the grease gun. I would pump grease into any xerk I could find, but I could never find them all, and dad would always point out the ones I missed.

The bottom line is that we couldn't afford **not** to oil all these moving parts because if we didn't, friction would wreak havoc, break things and cause unwanted delays.

Churches are not unlike farms, because they too have lots of moving parts. I know that many of us may only make it to church on Sunday morning and may not fully realize or appreciate all the things that occur on any given week here.

For example, during a typical week at FCC there are always outside groups that meet in our building both in the mornings and evenings.

Every week we have an AA group meet here.

An exercise group meets here weekly too.

We regularly have people dropping off food donations and others picking up food.

A cleaning crew comes in here every Friday morning to tidy up the place for Sunday.

Sometimes the Girl Scouts meet here for one of their many activities.

And so far, I've said nothing about church ministries:

There's Sunday School for children and adults.

In a couple of weeks we'll be resuming our after school ministry, SALT - Supporting Almont Learners and Teachers. This a ministry in which elementary students can come here after school to eat a snack, play a game, make a craft, get assistance with their homework, and most importantly, learn about Jesus. It's a ministry we've been operating at this church since 2018, and some of first students are now teaching our current students. It's pretty satisfying to watch.

On the same day as SALT, the men get together for lunch and have fellowship and read the Bible. This too is a very important time in the life of the church. And there'll be other ministries that will come aboard as the Lord sees fit.

Even our musicians make a habit of getting together at least once week to prepare for Sunday worship and let's not forget all the stuff our volunteer secretaries do to keep the whole church running smoothly - paying the bills, ordering supplies, answering phones, printing the bulletin, and sometimes even shewing away the occasional bat!

You'd think a church of this size wouldn't have that much to do, but I assure you, our jobs never seem to end.

This brings me to the central theme of my message: Check your oil. Make sure your spiritual motor is running efficiently and effectively. I think you probably understand what I mean by this.

I'm talking about our spiritual lives and whether or not our lives are being conditioned and lubricated by God's Holy Spirit. If it isn't, then we'll be caught trying to accomplish things for God under our own power and live Christian lives strictly with human effort. If this is the case, we're doomed to hardship, failure, and all sorts of frustration.

Now, I wouldn't call myself very mechanically inclined. Sure, I can jump start a car using jumper cables and change the occasional tire - I remember once I even changed the water pump on my 77 Cutlass Supreme way back when I was a teenager because teenagers will do about anything to have some sort of transportation) but usually when I look under the hood of a car, I get intimidated, but guess what? I can still find the dipstick and I can check the oil.

Any time my children plan a trip, I always ask them ... did you check the oil? I don't want them driving a car that is low on oil.

Because when you think about it, running out of oil in the car is far worse than running out of gas. Sure, when you run out of gas, your car won't go, and it's very inconvenient, but all you have to do is get more gas and fill it up. But if your car runs out of oil, permanent damage will be your lot and the junkyard will be your car's lot.

Parts heat up, metal expands, and the motor seizes up, never to work again. So, let's keep an eye on the oil in our car and in our lives.

We need to do this regularly – every few thousand miles, but especially as we enter the New Year. We may have set some goals and priorities for this year that we really want to see achieved, but before we fasten our seat belts and shift into gear to accomplish them, we'd better check our equipment and see if we're up to the challenge.

If we're operating at optimum levels, then we can be confident that we'll meet our goals, but if not, we shouldn't be too surprised when our good intentions fall by the wayside and we get stranded in need of a tow.

So, what I want us to do this morning is to take a moment to meditate on Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 1:14 where he writes, *"The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."*

And I want us to think about what it means to have grace and faith and love poured out on our lives and ask ourselves how these three gifts can help us not just reach our life goals but be better people of God – better Christians. Because without grace and faith and love, we'll just be empty chassis sitting around with no horsepower under the hood.

For example, when I think about the grace that has been afforded me and start to understand what the Lord Jesus had to go through to procure this grace for me – the persecution and opposition, the

emotional and bodily torture he endured, the spiritual separation from his Father in heaven, shouldn't I be able to be more flexible, gracious, understanding and tolerant of my fellow human beings, and definitely more energized to love and serve my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ?

If Jesus could say, *"Forgive them Father for they know not what they do"*, can't we also forgive when we're falsely accused or have been put in an awkward situation that causes harm to our name? I know it is difficult to forgive, and the first thing we are tempted to do is take defensive posture, but maybe our offenders are like Christ's offenders, and they do not know what they do. I'm not saying we should become a doormat and let people take advantage of us without any pushback, but let us shift into that gear called grace.

Grace is all about receiving something we don't deserve.

In the case of God toward us, God is giving us not just something we don't deserve, but also through grace, God affords us things we can never achieve by ourselves - a restored relationship with him, forgiveness of sins, purpose and peace and life everlasting.

In view of God's grace poured out on us, can we not offer each other a little bit more respect, understanding, and cooperation?

Typically, when Paul opens his letters, he uses the same phrase over and over again: *"Grace and peace to you."* Maybe what he was trying to get across to the new churches that he was writing to -and to us - the important point that peace and harmony among God's people will always be elusive we continue to operate outside God's grace. Grace and peace are so inextricably linked that you can't have one without the other. In fact, the church ceases to exist if God's grace is missing.

So let God check and fill your grace tank and remember Proverbs 3: 34:
"He mocks proud mockers, but gives grace to the humble."

The second gift we must account for is faith.

Hebrews 11:6 makes it abundantly clear that *"without faith it is impossible to please God."* And the reason why it is impossible to please God without faith is because faith is the very vehicle by which we are to approach Him.

God wants a deep and personal relationship with each of us, but we cannot have this in the absence of faith, so what does God do? He solves the problem by giving us the faith we need so that we can approach him freely and without fear. We don't have to fear his judgement, His scorn or rejection. We need not fear that God will close the bus doors and leave us stranded at the curb. Instead, God opens the door for us to receive him by faith. *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. Whoever hears my voice and opens the door I will come in and eat with him and he with me."* Rev. This is a metaphor of us exercising the gift of faith God has given us – not just once but every day. Have you opened the door of faith?

God's gift of faith to us clears the way for his acceptance of us!

And the amazing thing is that God never quantifies the amount of faith we need but instead reminds us that it is the object of our faith that is the greatest of importance. Paul writes in Galatians 2:20, *"I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*

Listen also to these verses in Hebrews 4: *"Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess" – that Jesus was perfect and took away our sin - let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence."*

In simplest terms, the gift of faith that God gives us is what allows us to receive God's grace without fear or trepidation.

I don't want anyone to be afraid.

I want us to have faith and so does God.

He wants us to have faith that gives us the courage to ask him for good and timely things.

He wants us to have faith that causes us to be patient and at the same time persevere in our prayers.

And he wants us to have the sort of faith that understands that He is working through every one of his children and that we all have something to learn from one another and teach one another.

In short, God wants us to have faith, knowing that what he has begun here at FCC, he will continue to build upon as long as we look to Him for our strength and purpose.

Finally, let us not forget to fill our love tank. I know this sounds a bit cheesy, but it needs to be checked as well.

We can never forget about this one because Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13, love is the greatest above all God's gifts, and John, Jesus' brother equates God with love in 1 John 4:8. And the Apostle Peter writes that we are to *"love one another deeply for love covers over a multitude of sins."*

But the question remains how are we to fill our love tank?

I think the answer partly lies in the verse we already read in 1 Timothy 1:14 where Paul writes *"The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly along with faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."*

If we are to receive any of God's gifts that he desires to pour out on us, then we must look up to him with clear eyes, sincere hearts and empty hands.

So often our vision of God is so distracted by the things of this world that we cannot pull our gaze away long enough to look above.

Other times when we do look up, we only look up with the wrong motivation - to shake our fist at God and ask, why have you done this to me? Placing blame on him instead of admitting to our wayward follies.

Finally, there are times when our hearts are so cluttered with other things that there's no room for God's Spirit who wants us to give us the grace, the faith and the love we need to live a full and God-honoring life.

No, if we are to receive the good gifts that God wants to pour out on us - the gifts of grace and faith and love – the gifts that are like oil to a machine and life-giving water to any living creature, that can bring peace and harmony to our world and to our church, then we must look heavenward with humility and receptivity and expectation and thankfulness.

In short, we must look to God as our only source of life itself. Amen.