

January 27, 2010
Bethany UMC
David W. Simpson
Sermon: *Bethany Outflow* Message 1: "Give Me This Water"
Scripture Lessons: Luke 7:11-16; John 4:13-15

Key Verse: "But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. The water I give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

Can you keep a secret? Have you ever heard that question? Someone has something they want to share with you because they are just dying to tell someone and even if they aren't sure you won't tell anyone else, they are probably going to tell you anyway. Can you keep a secret? Actually, I hope not. What I have to tell you is a secret to most of the people in the world but I hope you will help tell the story by telling it to everyone you meet. Are you ready? Here is it. **Your life is meant to overflow with unimaginable joy and power.** You know how I know. Someone told me in church. Because someone told them and someone shared the words and stories of Jesus with them and one of the things that Jesus said was "I have come that they may have life and that they may have it abundantly." I learned that in church and the reason that most of the world doesn't know it is that they don't go to church, at least not very often. Those of us who are followers of Jesus Christ have access to the most life-giving news imaginable and sometimes we treat it like a secret that we can't tell anyone.



There is a statistic that no matter how many times I hear it or say it, still it is surprising. Even though over 90 percent of Americans say they believe in God, a strong majority; upwards of 60 percent in the Mid-Atlantic claim no church affiliation, and on any given Sunday morning it is estimated that only about one quarter of the population is in church. The truth is that a lot of folks think church is a drag and many of them are happy to be missing church.

Why do you think that is? I mean do we have bad breath or something? Is it irrelevant? Are we hard to find? Is it just for children, so that when we are no longer children or don't have little children we should stop going?

I suggest that if we really want to know we should ask those who don't come. According to well know pastor and bestselling author Rick Warren, there are four major reasons people give for not going to church.

1. "Church services are boring, especially the sermons."
2. "Church members are unfriendly to visitors."
3. "The church is more interested in my money than in me."
4. "We worry about the quality of the church's childcare."

Warren goes on to point out that not one of these four reasons has anything to do with God. He goes on to say, "I rarely meet people who say, 'I don't go to church because I don't believe in God.'" The truth is most people are very open to learning about God, and even more consider themselves spiritual at some level; they just don't feel welcome at church or think that it has anything to offer them. And that is our problem.

Do you know what those folks who don't attend church are doing on Sunday morning? They are not sleeping in? They are doing anything and going anywhere where they can engage in what seems like a celebration of life. Let's have some fun! People want to go places where there is joy and celebration. Now look at the Warren's list again; they think we are boring and unfriendly and self-centered. In the eyes of the world the church often looks more like a funeral than a celebration. The good news is that when Jesus shows up on the scene, joy breaks out and the celebration begins. That is what was happening in the story in Luke in which Jesus raises the widow's son from the dead.



The reason people are always looking for things that celebrate life is because we know that all of us will have plenty of things that try our souls. Everyone encounters loss and hardship, confusion and dismay along the road of life. Like the widow it may be the death of a loved one, or the end of a marriage, a broken friendship, the loss of a job or a dream that has faded with the years. Life has its tragic aspects. This would be even more tragic if Jesus wasn't waiting to show up at the "funerals" of our lives and do what he did for the widow of Nain.

The gospel of Jesus Christ only becomes *good* news to us when it connects with the *bad* news in our lives. When our lives are going well, uninterrupted by hardship, suffering, or pain, there is little need for a Savior. But when we are hurting, when life's difficulties are too great to overcome on our own, we long to rely on the One whose love for us is never ending. That is what happened to the widow of Nain when she encountered Jesus. When she met him she could honestly say, "You have turned my mourning into joyful dancing....you have clothed me with joy."

God is all about real joy and lots of it. That is the good news that is still a secret to much of the world including a majority of the people who live in our community. The Bible often refers to God's feasts and parties. That is one of the points I like to make during our annual stewardship campaign, that God wants us to bring our gifts into his house and celebrate in his presence. It is the story we tell at Christmas, that when Jesus was born, angels and shepherds alike praised God,

God wants us to see all of life as a celebration of God's goodness. And that can happen even at a funeral. I am always grateful when I participate in the funeral of one of the saints of God, and the family and friends can celebrate the life even in the midst of grief. I don't know about you but when I die, I would hope my family and friends will be able to gather round and witness to the fact that Jesus showed up in my life and filled it with great relationships and good things on this earth. But more than that I hope they will be able to affirm that the love of God flowed through me and overflowed into the lives of those I met along the way.

I think that is a part of what Jesus meant when he said that he came that we might have life and have it abundantly. God wants us help us, through the power of his Spirit, to live a life worthy of a legacy. Our lives are meant to overflow with unimaginable joy and power. Jesus turns emptiness into overflowing life.

By now you may be saying, "Pastor, I agree. That all sounds very nice but it is easier said than done." I know. And, Jesus knows. We know from experience that in the midst of our pursuit of abundant life there are those forces at work among us that seem to want to suck all of the joy and hope out of our lives. Jesus warned us about that often and in doing so he refers to that force in several ways, such as the evil one, or Satan, or the thief. And in the Gospel of John, Jesus contrasts his own good desires for us with the intentions of thief. He said, "The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them rich and satisfying life."

Have you experience the work of the thief? What has he stolen from you? What good things has he strangled or destroyed in your life? How do you feel about him? I hope you take those questions seriously, but I don't want you to dwell there because that is not the end of the story. There is good news and reason to celebrate.

If you look at the passage from John 10:10 you see that Jesus promises us abundant life. The Greek word there is *perissos*, and a more literal translation is "exceeding" or "full to overflowing." So another way of saying it is that Jesus came to earth because he wants us to overflow with more life that we've ever imagined.

How much life and joy can you imagine? Are you experiencing that kind of fullness? Or are you like me, still thirsty for more joy, deeper happiness, and real meaning? If so, then listen again to what Jesus told the woman at the well in Sychar. He said, 'Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life.' I love her response, "Please sir, give me this water."

Like so many folk who are looking for anyplace and anything that seems to offer a celebration of life, the woman at the well had been seeking, but not finding happiness and fulfillment, She had been married fives times and was currently living with a man who wasn't her husband. She could just as easily been looking for fulfillment by trying to find the perfect house, raise the perfect child, have the perfect joy, or car, or tan, or body, lawn or the perfect "you name it."

The woman probably didn't really understand all of what Jesus was offering her that day, but she knew she was tired of being thirsty, tired of constantly seeking and never quite finding the fulfillment she longed for. As far as she was concerned, Jesus' offer of thirst quenching water was a no brainer.

The living water flowing into the woman at the well was just part of Christ's gift. Do you remember Jesus' promise in John 4:15? Jesus' water would be a spring gushing to eternal life. In other words, if we trust Jesus, "gushing fountains of endless life" will flow out of us. Jesus promises both an inflow and an outflow. If you want to be filled, you've got to be willing to let Christ's living water flow out of you as well. Jesus turns self-focused lives outward. When the woman came to the well she was focused on herself, her own needs, and her own troubles. But, after she encountered Jesus, her joy flowed out all over the community.

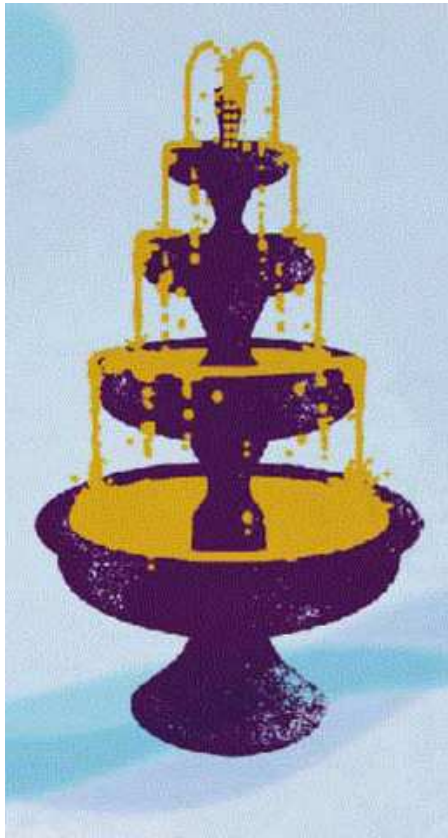
This is the point when some of you will be tempted to say, "You know, I love Jesus, I love being filled with his spirit, I am even willing to sing "Fill My Cup, Lord" but don't expect me to be some sort of Billy Graham." Well, don't worry; I am not getting ready to ask you to behave like a skilled evangelist or like some obnoxious, high-pressure salesperson. The point is that God understands us and our nature. That's why he promises to fill us up before he asks us to flow outward. If that scares you a little or you feel inadequate then you are in good company, all of Jesus' disciples felt the same way. Even after they had witnessed the resurrected Jesus, some of them, including Peter, went right back to doing what they did before they met Jesus, they went fishing. They felt inadequate. We feel inadequate and that's okay, because the truth is that unless Jesus fills us up, every one of us is inadequate.

It was their insufficiency and our inadequateness to be witnesses for Jesus is the context of Jesus last words before he ascended to heaven. The words appear in the eighth verse of the Acts 1. And this verse is key to our whole **Outflow** series, let's read **Acts 1: 8:**

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'

Do you think the promise of overflowing life was just for the woman at the well? Is that power and wonderful outflow of God's kingdom described in Acts 1:8 just for the apostles? If it was then welcome to the funeral, but if it's not then get ready for the party, let's celebrate.

Over the next four weeks we will explore together this whole notion of God's inflow and outflow in our lives. Acts 1:8 will be our roadmap because it establishes the pattern God still uses to flow into us so that he can flow out of us and into the world. One of the ways we will do this is to imagine God's flow like a four-tiered fountain.



a. The top tier of the fountain represents Jerusalem: a personal relationship with God. Jesus is the spring of living water. Next week's message will be about the ins and outs of having an authentic relationship with God. If you have someone you know to have a closer relationship with Jesus then bring them along

b. The second tier of the fountain represents Judea: relationships with family and friends. In the New Testament, Judea was the place most of Christ's followers thought of as home. We will focus on that in two weeks.

c. The third tier represents Samaria: the community around us, especially people who don't look, believe, or act as we do. Jews avoided and even feared the land called Samaria. For us, Samaria represents our community at large, all those people who aren't yet with us. That will be week four.

d. The base of the fountain represents the ultimate destination: the ends of the earth. In the last week we will explore the kind of difference each of us can continually make in the world.

Let me close with this thought. In last week's sermon we noted that in the creation account, the Spirit hovered over the face of the waters and brought order out of chaos, we are birthed in the waters of a woman, God delivered his people through the waters of the Red Sea, and the River Jordan, we are birthed into new life through the waters of baptism, Jesus offered us water that will satisfy our thirst for meaning and belonging, and when we come to the end of our journey on earth, according to the last chapter of the Bible, God will have prepared a place for us, and the Spirit gives the last command saying "Come, let anyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who desires drink freely from the water of life."



So, if you are thirsty this morning, I invite you to accept the living water Jesus offers. Jesus says come, and if you come to the living water, the joy, the love, the outward-flowing power of the Holy Spirit is yours for the asking. It doesn't matter if you are seeking God for the first time or if you have known him all your life, you can pray this simple prayer with me now, "Jesus, here I am. Come into my heart and fill me with your living water. Wash away my sins and make your life flow out through me. Amen."

If you prayed that prayer, you are going to start to be filled, and God's Spirit is going to start to bubble up and pour out from your life. We want to help you get started on that journey. So we have made some preparations for you.

1. Bibles, free to pick up at the Welcome desk under the Outflow banner, or if you are too shy to do that take one from anyplace you see it in a stack.
2. We have an insert for you take home and get started
3. We still have some groups you can join
4. We have some celebration fountains flowing in the fellowship hall
5. And always, we remember the waters of our baptism so we have placed the font in the narthex for your remembrance.

Come to the fountains of living water so that it may flow into and out of you. Thanks be to God. Amen.