

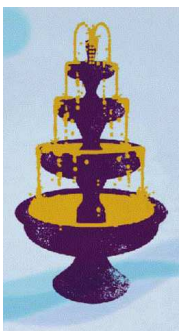
January 24, 2010  
BUMC  
Cathy Vitek  
Sermon: Outflow 2: "Fill Me Up"  
Scripture: Acts 3:1-10

Last Sunday, we started a five week worship series called Outflow. We are exploring what it means that God intends for our lives **to overflow with unimaginable joy and power**. Last week Pastor David reminded us of John 10:10, that Jesus came so that we might have life and to have it abundantly. He told us that a more literal translation is that Jesus came so that we might have a life "full to overflowing", and then he spoke about the story of the Samaritan woman and the well, and called to our attention Jesus' words: whoever drinks the water Jesus gives will never thirst again. The water Jesus gives will become a spring of water gushing to eternal life. "In other words, he said, 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."



And then Pastor David had us read Acts 1:8 together: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." This verse is our theme verse and our road map during this worship series because it establishes the pattern God still uses to flow into us so that he can flow out of us and into the world.

He invited us to imagine God's flow like a four-tiered fountain.



- The top tier of the fountain represents Jerusalem: a personal relationship with God
- The second tier of the fountain represents Judea: relationships with family and friends.
- The third tier represents Samaria: the community around us, especially people who don't look, believe, or act as we do
- The base of the fountain represents the ultimate destination: the ends of the earth.

God wants to pour overflowing life into and through us. But before God can fill us up, we need to have a living relationship with him. So today we are going to take a

closer look at the top tier, the one that represents Jerusalem and having a personal relationship with God.

What does that look like, to have a personal relationship with God? Well, I think one place we can start to understand this is to look at the human relationships we encounter. For example: When I was 8 years old, my brother and I were playing baseball with my dad in the back yard. My Dad was pitcher, and my brother and I were taking turns at bat. It was great fun, and I was getting some pretty good hits. And then, my Dad pitched this ball, and I watched it coming closer, and closer, and closer to my face – and my head was saying “that ball is going to hit my nose” and my heart was saying “that could never happen – my dad threw that ball”....well, I can show you the knot that’s still on my nose....it was really messy, and my dad said – in his big dad voice – “Cathy, why didn’t you move?” and all I could say is “because you threw the ball”...and what I meant was....I totally trusted that everything my dad did and said would be for good in my life...I tease my dad now, that that was a defining moment for me – my dad was not God...but that child-like faith and trust--that God intends everything to work for good in our lives...that’s one way to relate to God.



Overflowing life depends on how we relate with God. Just like the happiness of a marriage depends on how a husband and wife relate, being filled to overflowing depends on the kind of relationship we are experiencing – or not experiencing— with God.

What kind of relationship would you like to have with God?

Or maybe it’s easier to look at it from this angle: What kind of relationship are you sure you don’t want to have with human beings? How would you feel about hanging out with people who are stingy and self-focused, sour and legalistic, angry and vindictive , or apathetic and uncaring. You probably wouldn’t want to spend a lot of time in close personal relationship with those folk would you? The sad thing is that many people view God in these negative terms.

There are a lot of distorted perceptions of God. Just listen to the “reasons” the so-called “experts” are giving for the devastating earthquakes in Haiti. Or the people from that church in the mid-West who continue to make local and national headlines by proclaiming that God hates this country and those killed in military action because of our national policy to refuse discrimination to homosexuals. Or, I think it’s easy to see from my earlier illustrations that we tend to ascribe to God the characteristics of our human fathers. In his book *Always a Daddy’s Girl*, Christian counselor Norman Wright notes that “If your father was a weakling, and you couldn’t depend on him to help you, or defend you, your image of God may be that of a weakling. You may fee that you are unworthy of God’s comfort and

support, or that He is unable to help you.” Or, if we had a father who is critical, harsh and discouraging, that affects our view of ourselves and of God.

But the good news is – the great news is – that God is not like those portrayals at all....according to the New Testament, God is exactly like Jesus! In John 10:30, Jesus says: “The Father and I are one.” And in Colossians 1:15, Paul writes that Jesus “is the visible image of the invisible God”. Since we saw Jesus, we know what God is like!

Jesus is **generous** – generous to the point of giving up his life for us (1 John 3:16), Jesus is **accepting**; he accepted the least and the lost -- children, women, strangers and the infirmed. Jesus is **forgiving**: Jesus asked God to forgive the very people who beat him and crucified him, saying “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Jesus is **interested** in you and in me; 1 Peter 5:7 says “Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.” And in Matthew 11:28 Jesus says: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest". Since we know these things are true about Jesus, we know they are also true about God. These truths are far different than the negative perceptions humans can sometimes project. And so it shouldn't surprise us that Jesus approaches relationships differently than humans do as well.

The famous poet W.H. Auden once said, “Almost all of our relationships begin and most of them continue as forms of mutual exploitation, a mental or physical barter to be terminated when one or both parties run out of goods.” Oh, I so don't want to think that's true. But I think it may be. It may be accurate that most human relationships flow from conscious or unconscious “What's in it for me” calculations. Just think about your high school days – where did you fit? Did you ever try to make friend of someone who might help you to fit in better? Or think about the business world – most business relationships I can think of at least started out about: what or where can you get me. But unlike the popular kids in high school or the up-and-coming executive crowd in many workplaces, Jesus doesn't seek out relationships for what *he can get from them*. He's not looking for acceptance or status or for people who will make him look good...just look at who he chose to hang out with:

Look, for example, at Simon Peter. Matthew 4:18-20 tells us that Simon called Peter and his brother, Andrew, were the first disciples that Jesus called into ministry with him. They were on their boat casting their nets when Jesus called. Now I don't know if you've ever visited a fish market on a dock where the fish boats are bringing in the fish, but here's what I can tell you: running a fishing boat is a dirty, smelly, dangerous job. Handling fish and nets all day and then getting the catch ready for market means being covered with sweat, blood and fish guts most of the time – maybe Jesus



could smell Simon Peter and Andrew before he could see them!

And in Simon Peter's case, there were the added issues of a hot temper and a seeming inability to pay attention. He wasn't exactly the sophisticated, levelheaded executive that we'd select as our go-to guy to lead a world-wide movement. And yet, this smelly, hot-tempered fisherman is just who Jesus chose to build his church upon. You see, Jesus doesn't care how people look or even how they view themselves. Instead, he sees past the surface "us" to the "us" we're created to be.



Or look at Nicodemus. Nicodemus was just about as different from Peter as a person could be. Nicodemus was the well respected religious teacher who came to Jesus during the night because he wanted to know more about what Jesus was teaching. But Jesus wasn't impressed with his education or his reputation; as a matter of fact, Jesus had to explain the most elementary ideas about having a relationship with God to this learned religious man. The point is that Jesus doesn't depend on one's reputation or how much one knows (or doesn't know) about the Bible. Jesus just wants us to get to know him, to have a personal relationship with him.



Peter was loud and messy in his relationship with Jesus. When you read about him, you recognize someone who is bold, enthusiastic and one who often talked acted before thinking. One minute Jesus praised him for his faith, and the next he chastised him for having too little faith. The bottom line is that Jesus and Peter had a great relationship; it fit them perfectly.

Nicodemus, on the other hand, was slow and steady. He approached Jesus cautiously. He had questions, and thought maybe, just possibly, Jesus had answers. Nicodemus didn't dive in head first as Peter did. He was careful. He came to Jesus in the middle of the night so he wouldn't draw undue attention. But as time passed, it's evident that his relationship with Jesus grew.

We could lift up many other Biblical personalities. The truth is, there are as many ways to approach Jesus as there are people. Jesus always meets us where we are, with all the character traits and experiences that make us unique. But while we all approach Jesus differently, a healthy relationship with Jesus includes time praying and worshipping, time reading the Bible, time being together with fellow Christ-followers, and time serving others and showing them Christ's love in practical ways. At Bethany, we offer our GIFT groups where we grow in faith together, Spiritdaze worship and study opportunities for women, opportunities to serve at the Route 1 Day shelter; we have several prayer groups, and

opportunities to serve in music and worship ministries. The opportunities to grow in relationship with Jesus are many and varied...because we are all unique in our relationship to Jesus, and Jesus wants to have the kind of relationship *with us* that will fill *us* up.

You may be asking yourself: “How will I know I’m doing the things that fill me up?” That’s the important question! When a life is tapped into Jesus, it won’t be long before it starts to *overflow*. Let’s look again at Peter and Nicodemus. They were deeply transformed by their relationships with Jesus. They began to think, feel, and act differently toward others. They stopped thinking only about themselves and their worries, and began pouring out the compassion, joy and power they’d received from Jesus.

Nicodemus first visited Jesus in secret, because he didn’t want others to know he was associating with him. But after being filled by his relationship with Jesus, Nicodemus was the only one who stood up for him in court when he was accused (John 7:50). And then when Jesus’ body was taken down from the cross and placed in the tomb, Nicodemus again risked his life and reputation by anointing this “condemned criminal’s” body with expensive myrrh and spices (John 19:39). He was so full of life that life had to pour out.

And look at Peter: Right before and for some time after the crucifixion, Peter hid his face and pretended that he didn’t even know Jesus. But after he was filled with the Holy Spirit, he began speaking to crowds and doing the kinds of things Jesus did, like having compassion for hurting people and healing them. That’s what we find Peter doing in the scripture lesson we read today. Peter and John encounter a crippled beggar as they were on their way into the Temple to pray. Peter said, “I don’t have any silver or gold for you. But I’ll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!” and scripture goes on to tell us “Then Peter took the lame man by the right hand and helped him up. And as he did, the man’s feet and ankles were instantly healed and strengthened. He jumped up, stood on his feet, and began to walk! Then, walking, leaping, and praising God, he went into the Temple with them.”

Peter was so full of life, compassion, and power that he couldn’t help pouring it out wherever he went. And did you catch what else happened? All of the people gathered recognized the lame man...knew that he was a beggar...knew that he could not walk; but there he was, leaping his way into the temple and praising God. That was his witness to being filled abundantly, and it caused a whole lot commotion and more opportunity for Peter to preach about Jesus, and a little further on in scripture, we know that more and more began to believe the message and 5000 more believers were added. Now that is outflow!

No matter what our personality or faith journey is to date, we have to be filled up with Jesus before we will experience outflow. If any of you here today aren’t being as

filled as you want to be, what are you waiting for? Jesus says, “Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives, Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened” (Matthew 7:7-8).

It doesn't matter whether you are seeking a relationship with God for the first time or if you've known God for all your life; if your heart's desire today is to move more fully in relationship with God, please just pray with me this simple prayer: “Jesus, here I am. Fill me with your living water. Wash away my sins, and make your life flow out through me.”

I believe what Pastor David said last week, “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 have some things to help you on this journey.

1. If you would like a private time and place to continue your prayer, I invite you to visit our meditation room, and to come see me if you'd like a time of private prayer. I can help arrange that for you.
2. 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.
3. We have an insert for you take home and get started
4. We still have some groups you can join – on-line discussion group available through our website, address listed in bulletins.
5. Always, we remember the waters of our baptism so we have placed the font, opened and filled, in rear of the sanctuary for your remembrance. It's also appropriate and beautiful to remember at the fountain flowing in the narthex.
6. And today, we have a special invitation: an invitation to the great water giveaway! I invite you to take 2 water bottles on your way out of the sanctuary today...take one to drink yourself – every time you take a sip, remembrance that we need to be filled up with Jesus...and take one to give away as a practical way of letting God's love flow out of you and into the community. After all, we all are thirsty for living water!

