

INTRO: Throughout these weeks of Outflow, we've been using a fountain as a metaphor of what God wants us to be and to do. If you recall, this verse is kind of a map of where we've been and where we're going. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8 NLT) The top level of the fountain represents being filled up with God Himself. Outflow begins with inflow. When that happens, then our relationship with God will overflow outwards towards others, starting with our families and friends. That's our Jerusalem and Judea, so to speak, those closest to us – family and friends. The next level of outflow is towards the community around us. That's our Samaria. These are people unlike us in many ways but people, nevertheless, for whom Jesus died and rose again. God wants you and me to be a channel of His love and grace into their lives. The final level of outflow is the biggest pool of all – the world or the ends of the earth itself. That's what we want to think about today for a few minutes. Here's the first of three very simple but important truths.

WE'RE SENT.

God's plan hasn't changed one iota since the first church – the first group of committed Jesus' followers – was brought together about two months after the resurrected Jesus went back to heaven. First of all, God wants to use every follower of Jesus to reach the world. Jesus Himself laid out the plan. In praying to God His Father, He said, "Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world." (John 17:18 NLT) He wasn't referring to just the twelve disciples, but every follower of Jesus from then on. God Himself says in His Word, "I've set you up as light to all nations. You'll proclaim salvation to the four winds and seven seas!" (Acts 13:47 MSG) Who is "you"? You and me – every follower of Jesus – that's the clear implication of that verse.

It's a joy for me to get to know more and more about this church. And one of the best things about this church is its interest in missions – taking the good news of Jesus to far away places. We've given a lot of money to missions over the years. Even more exciting to me than that is the fact that several folk have gone out from our church as missionaries. Maybe the best example is Kim Brown. She left for Thailand almost 25 years ago and God has led her into this incredible ministry to women and children caught up in AIDS and prostitution. She's offering the love of Jesus in a practical way through her House of Love. It's a tremendous ministry and it's our honor as a congregation to be identified with it.

I think of Dr. Pete and Judy Obregon who go off on medical missionary trips about 6-8 times a year. I believe that Pete and Judy have probably done more to help this church get a heart for the world than any two other people. Several of you have gone with them on their trips. Some have been inspired to go into

medicine as a result and are now going on short term mission trips, too. It's a privilege to support Pete and Judy in their ministry. I think of Brian and Jenny Metzger who are serving the Lord through Campus Crusade right here at Ohio State – influencing young people at a critical time in their lives and encouraging them to make Jesus the center of it all. We support them as well. I think of Chris and Penelope Kauffman (Penelope was on staff here for a period of time) and their ministry to international students at Ohio State. What a strategic way to impact the world by reaching for Christ the brightest and best from other countries! Our Branches Sunday School class supports them.

In less than a month we're saying good-bye to the Trumbo family. Jared's been our Youth Director for eight years or so, but recently he and Chyloe responded to God's call to go to China and begin working with what could be the neediest segment of that huge population - the exploding orphan population. The potential of that ministry is staggering. It will be our privilege to support them as well. We've helped to send many others on short-term mission trips of one kind and another, and I hope we continue to do that and more. It's one important way for our church to keep getting a heart for the whole world.

Now, let's make sure we make something very clear, however. You do not have to become a full time missionary to impact the world. You do not even have to leave your home to impact the world. Let's listen to Jeff Henderson, the executive director of an organization called Off the Map, talk about broadening our definition of evangelism.

DVD: PLAY CLIP #5 – “Paying Attention”

So, again, we're sent – each of us and all of us. Some of us will go overseas. Others of us will go to our workplaces, our schools and our neighborhoods. But all of us are sent somewhere. In light of that fact, you and I need to remember, secondly, that no excuse is acceptable to God. Do you remember Moses' conversation with God when God wanted to send him back to Egypt to lead the people of Israel out of their slavery? Moses offered a litany of excuses! For instance, Moses didn't think he had the right preparation to be sent by God. He says, “Who am I to appear before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?” (Exodus 3:1 NLT). God's answer was, “Moses, I'm going to be with you.” In other words, your lack of preparation is not an acceptable excuse. God had prepared Moses through his life experiences far better than Moses knew. And He's done the same with you. And when God sends you and wherever He sends you, you will never be alone.

Then, Moses argued that his knowledge of God was lacking. He says, “If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, “The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,” they will ask me, “What is his name?” Then what should I tell them?” (Exodus 3:13 NLT) God's answer was, “Moses, I AM WHO I AM and I will be with you. Let's go.” In other words, your lack of knowledge about God is not an

acceptable excuse. Many Jesus followers don't feel that God can use them because they don't know enough about the Bible yet or whatever. It's a lie that the devil plants in your heart and mind. Of course, it's important to grow in your knowledge of God and His Word, but the very best way to become spiritually mature is to go and do when and where God calls and sends you.

Moses' next excuse had to do with his abilities. He says, "What if they won't believe me or listen to me? What if they say, 'The LORD never appeared to you'?" (Exodus 4:1 NLT) God says, "Moses, what do you have in your hand?" Moses says, "A shepherd's staff." God says, "Throw it down." The staff becomes a snake. And when Moses picked up the snake by its tail, it became a staff again. It was a miraculous sign God gave Moses to convince both Israelites and Egyptians that Moses was sent by God. What's the implication? Your lack of abilities is not an acceptable excuse. What's in your hand today? It's your unique life story, your knowledge, your profession, your skills, your opportunities. God can use all of that and wants to use all of that. At the end of the day, it's not about your abilities anyway. It's God in you and working through you.

Then Moses says, "O Lord, I'm not very good with words. I never have been, and I'm not now, even though you have spoken to me. I get tongue-tied, and my words get tangled." (Exodus 4:11 NLT) God says, "Moses, I made your mouth. I'll be with you and give you the words you need." In other words, your lack of verbal skills is not an acceptable excuse. I think of what Jesus said to His followers, "... 'I will give you the right words and such wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to reply or refute you!'" (Luke 21:15 NLT) Moses' final excuse was the most honest and the most serious. "Lord, please! Send anyone else." (Exodus 4:13 NLT) Moses thought his unwillingness was an acceptable excuse. It wasn't, of course. God made his brother, Aaron, a kind of sidekick, but He insisted Moses go anyway. In other words, your unwillingness to serve God is not an acceptable excuse. No excuse is acceptable to God.

Thirdly, we're called "to go and be" not just to ask people "to come and see." People who love Jesus and want to be used by Him to reach others have been learning an important lesson in recent years. It used to be true in our country that we could adopt a "come and see" attitude in the local church and people would respond. In other words, we could offer a beautiful building and great programs and folk would come to church and some would find Jesus that way. Do you remember that line in the movie, *Field of Dreams*: "If you build it, they will come"? Unfortunately, that's mostly just true in the movies. The world's great cities are full of beautiful, *empty* churches. God isn't calling the world out there to come to church. He's calling the church to go to the world. "Come and see" doesn't work anymore if it ever really did. "Go and be" is God's plan and method. And when God's people are going and being, first and foremost, then the people whose lives are being impacted are much more apt to come and see! So, we're sent. Here's a second simple but important truth.

WE'RE SALT AND LIGHT.

Here's a fresh rendering of a well known Bible passage. Jesus is speaking: "Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage. Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:13-16 MSG)

Like salt, you're called to be a change agent. Salt melts ice. When you're full of Jesus, He gives you the ability to melt the cold indifference of some people who don't follow Jesus yet by allowing His love to pour out of you. Salt enhances the flavor of food. Jesus brings flavor to life. Without Him, life is a dry, tasteless existence. Salt preserves food. When you're full of the Holy Spirit, you permeate this world with the life-sustaining and life-enhancing message of Jesus. Salt makes people thirsty. When people see you authentically full of Jesus, many of them - not all, but many - will want what you have. Like salt, God can't use you if you stay in the container. Your own life can become just a container if you're content to live for yourself and keep people without Jesus at arm's length. Your church can become just a container if all we do is ask people to come and see instead of going out, being and doing.

Like light, you can draw people to the source of your light – Jesus. We live in a dark world full of fear, hate, evil and selfishness. Knowing the Lord gives you light to walk by, but as you walk in that light, you can become the light that leads others toward God. Like light, you're meant to bring Jesus' light into someone's darkness every day you live. Your actions even towards the most uninteresting people you encounter can be used by the Holy Spirit to attract and transform others. Don't dare minimize the effect of Jesus' light shining through you!

ILLUS: *I read about a Puerto Rican woman who, after receiving Jesus as her Savior at her church, went to see her pastor. She spoke little English, but through an interpreter she made it clear that she wanted to share the light she'd received with others. "Please, let me do something," she begged. The church she attended had an extensive bus ministry, so the pastor invited her to ride on the buses and just love the kids. That's what she did. She rode on a different bus each week and loved the children. She'd look for the saddest looking kid, put him or her on her lap and whisper some of the few English words she knew: "I love you and Jesus loves you." After several months, she started riding the same bus each week because one little boy had captured her heart. Although he never spoke, she rocked him on her lap all the way to Sunday School and all the*

way home, whispering, "I love you and Jesus loves you." He never made a sound until one day he turned around, threw his arms around her, gave her a big hug and stammered, "I – I love you, too." At 6:00 that same evening, that special little boy was found dead under a fire escape. His mother had beaten him to death and thrown his body out with the trash. And yet, in the weeks before his short life ended, some light had shown into his darkness. He'd heard the Gospel in Sunday School, to be sure, but he'd also been loved and held. And some of the last words he ever heard were, "I love you and Jesus loves you." Don't dare minimize what God can do through you if you're willing and available. Here's a third simple but important truth:

WE'RE SEED SOWERS.

I won't take the time today to read Jesus' story about how He compared the Kingdom of God to a farmer sowing his seeds. But in that story, the farmer throws his seed on all sorts of ground: soil that was packed down and hard, soil that was shallow and rocky, soil that was infested with thorn seeds that would grow up and choke out the good grain, and soil that was good and fertile. Interestingly, the farmer doesn't seem too worried about wasting his seeds. He knows that some of the seeds he throws out will not germinate for one reason or another. He also knows that some of the seeds will find a good home, take root and grow. So, he plants lots of seeds.

What's the lesson? Like the farmer, plant lots of seeds of God's love. In other words, sow as many seeds of God's kindness in people's hearts as you can possibly sow. Or, to put it another way, like the farmer, don't be cheap with the seeds of God's love. Maybe you think of your bag of seed, so to speak, as very limited. You look at the small amount of time and energy you think you have after work demands, after family demands and after life demands, and you begin to say to yourself, "I won't use it unless I know for sure it will bring someone to Jesus." You can't know that. But God does have the power to turn your scarcity into abundance. Here's what God's Word says, "Farmers who wait for perfect weather never plant. If they watch every cloud, they never harvest. Just as you cannot understand the path of the wind or the mystery of a tiny baby growing in its mother's womb, so you cannot understand the activity of God, who does all things. Plant your seed in the morning and keep busy all afternoon, for you don't know if profit will come from one activity or another—or maybe both." (Ecclesiastes 11:4-6 NLT)

ILLUS: *It had been a crazy day at the end of a stressful week. Emotionally, Janie was running on empty. After skipping lunch and rushing through the last few hours of work, she'd managed to squeeze out half an hour to speed over to the mall and pick up the latest iPod for her teenage son's birthday. She got even more frustrated fighting the traffic and finding a parking space. The last thing Janie wanted to see was a long line of people standing outside the computer*

store waiting to get it. Hoping the line might shrink by the time she got back, she headed for a nearby women's restroom.

Janie rushed in and was more than a little surprised to see a man in the women's restroom. He was standing at one of the sinks desperately trying to rinse out some very dirty baby clothes while the young woman next to him tried unsuccessfully to comfort their shivering infant. It dawned on Janie immediately that the couple didn't have any extra clothes for their baby. A flash of inspiration replaced her weariness and she found herself sprinting down the mall to the baby department at Sears.

Returning to the bathroom nearly out of breath, she was overjoyed to find the young couple still there, carefully trying to dry their baby's clothes under the hand dryer. With a big grin on her face, Janie told them, "God wants you to know He loves you, so here's a bag with two new sets of clothes for your beautiful baby!" The couple was speechless at first. Then tears started filling their eyes and words of gratitude to God began filling the ladies' restroom at the mall.

Janie discovered something else. Instead of being even more tired and drained by all this reaching out, she was strangely and wonderfully energized by the knowledge that this couple was walking away with much more than new baby clothes. They'd felt God caring about them personally. And God had used Janie to convey that truth. On the way to the mall, Janie hadn't thought she had the time, money or energy to spare for anyone outside her own family, but on the way home she was full to overflowing with God. That's what happens when you perceive and respond to God's call to outflow.

CONCL: We're sent. We're salt and light. We're seed sowers. And when we obey, God fills us with an energy and joy that He alone can give.