

Outflow, Week 3: A Multitude of Kisses
Acts 11:11-14, 1 Corinthians 3:16, John 3:3
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In the movie “Eagle Eye”, a young man goes to an ATM and discovers that \$750,000 has been transferred into his account. In shock he returns to his apartment and finds it packed with weapons. The phone rings and a voice tells him to get out of the apartment because the FBI is about to arrest him. He hesitates; suddenly the FBI is knocking at the door. While being interrogated in the FBI office, another call tells him to jump out of the window when a crane smashes it. These orchestrated events keep happening; messages on his phone or a TV screen tell of some arrangement if he heeds the message. Along the way a woman becomes his partner after the phone voice threatens to kill her son.

Eventually they discover that a homeland security super-computer has chosen them to assassinate the president because he is trying to pull the plug on a runaway anti-terrorism computer network. Eagle Eye makes you wonder if networked computers with artificial intelligence could ever destroy our freedom.

In contrast, the Bible demonstrates how the Sovereign God’s network sends messages and arranging encounters in order to bless people, to free us from sin and grant us life. Acts 10 tells of a remarkable encounter that opened the door for Gentiles to become God’s people. I’ll give you the “Michael version.” At the port city of Caesarea, with its large garrison of Roman soldiers, a centurion named Cornelius lived with his family. Though a regimental commander of Caesar’s occupation force, he worshipped the God of the Jews, prayed regularly, and was generous to the poor. One day an angel appeared to Cornelius, saying,

“Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.”

And so Cornelius sent two of his servants and one of his soldiers to Joppa, present-day Tel Aviv.

At noon the following day, while praying on the roof, Peter fell into a trance. In his vision he saw an unclean animal and heard a voice saying “kill and eat.” He protested that a Jew could not eat them. The voice said “do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”

When Peter came out of trance, the men sent by Cornelius were at the gate, calling out for Peter. He sensed the Spirit saying, “Do not hesitate; go with them, for I have sent them.” After the men compared their visions, Peter went to Cornelius’ house, fulfilling the mandate expressed in Acts 11:14, ‘ As soon as he began to speak about Jesus, the Holy Spirit fell upon the Gentiles. They spoke in tongues, leaving no doubt that Cornelius’ family should be baptized.

Few of us see the hand of God work in such dramatic ways. This was a pivotal moment for humanity—the long-awaited invitation for Gentiles to join the Jews as God’s people—so the Lord wanted Peter and Cornelius to have no doubt that their meeting was a God-thing.

But He’s usually more subtle, we can trust that the Lord goes ahead of us, awakening people to His presence, and arranging for our paths to cross in “divine appointments.” As people of prayer, we will sense His leadings,

and move in concert with God's Spirit, and be those that God appoints to share hope with others. God loves to use His network to bless people.

In 1 Corinthians 3:6, Paul wrote, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow." Paul was a great evangelist, but he knew it took a team effort to help a person trust in Jesus. And Paul knew that only God can make faith grow. None of us are God's salesmen; we don't push people or argue people into God's Kingdom. As we drink the well-spring of God's grace, it becomes a well-spring of grace in us, which overflows back to God, then overflows to our family, friends, our community, the larger world. As we read this week in the Outflow book, this outflow of grace means scattering lots of Gospel seeds, primarily through acts of kindness. These seeds are watered, often by our listening, which builds a trust which God uses to open hearts and minds.

God's grace outflows first back to God, then it spills over into our families and close friends. Often we feel anxious about evangelizing loved ones; we worry about offending them, while we also feel lots of pressure to help them receive salvation. Yet the scripture tells us that we can relax knowing that we're on a team, and that God gives the growth. We do our part, scattered seeds and watering, trusting that God will send others—new friends, mentors, work colleagues, other churches, other pastors, para-church ministries. And we can trust God to minister to our loved ones in order to give growth. Ultimately it's in God's hands. How conversion happens is a mystery. Jesus compared the work of God's Spirit to the movement of the invisible wind,

⁸The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." (John 3:8)

Our job is to be faithful with the outflow that God's grace will give us, if we allow it to flow. The best way to scatter seeds is deeds of kindness. As Colossians 3:12 says, *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.* To be clothed with kindness and these other beautiful qualities is the best way to express the good news of what God's doing in you. When we scatter lots of kindness in the soil around us, we increase the likelihood that some of those seeds will germinate.

Today happens to be Valentine's Day, which was initially inspired by a selfless Christ-follower. Valentinus was a courageous Christian who visited those in Roman prisons. He was beheaded as a martyr and buried north of Rome on February 14.

Our culture emphasizes erotic love on Valentine's Day; let's use it to practice *agape*, sacrificial love that builds others up. Trinity's office volunteers sacrificed many hours for us creating special Valentines' cards for us to give. They feature a chocolate "kiss" and say "You've been kissed! Someone has demonstrated this small act of kindness to show God's love to you in a practical way"

In the days to come, ask God to open your eyes to some new way of being kind to a family member or friend: wash that pile of dishes, vacuum his or her car, buy someone a magazine. Coming the week after Valentine's Day, these deeds might surprise them. Leave them a "kiss card" to communicate in a light-hearted way that you're excited about what God's doing in your life. Obviously, a few token deeds won't totally open a hardened heart, but they might start a conversation. If you're like me, it helps to have tangible ways to improve. Every journey has its first steps.

We're going to invite you to come and get your Valentines. After placing your communication cards and offering on the Communion Table, pick up three Valentine kiss cards to use in your ministry of kindness. Awake each day praying that God's grace will overflow to your family and friends. Always pray that the Lord sends others to sow seeds and water, that God grants your loved ones spiritual growth, that they also drink His grace.