

Outflow Series, Week 2: Fill 'er Up!
Luke 10:38-42, John 12:1-8, 2 Corinthians 2:14b
 February 7, 2010
 Michael Carey

[Watch “Hide and Seek” video clip from *Outflow* DVD.]

I like this image! By His very nature, God is hidden from us, but in love, He deliberately “sticks His foot out” from under the curtain, so we can find Him. Jesus said, “Seek and you will find.” (Matt. 7:7) We think of ourselves as spiritual seekers, but in truth, God is the Seeker, and we are the sought-after. After we have “found” Him, we realize that the otherwise hidden God has been leaving clues, sending signs, arranging spiritually-resonating conversations.

We matter to the Father. The seeking God wants a relationship that will last forever, so He helps us to seek and find Him.

As Hoyt shared last week, the premise of this Outflow series is that every Christ follower is to become like a fountain. As Jesus said to the woman at the well, “the water I give will become in him (or her) a well-spring of eternal life.” (John 4:14) When God fills us with spiritual life, there is an abundance that overflows; first it creates a relationship that blesses God; then splashes our families and friends, the community around us, and the larger world. Turn to Luke 10 as we focus today on how God’s grace fills us up and overflows in our love for God.

It’s always startling to hear the Bible’s insistence that God wants a relationship; that God will give His attention to us, that receiving our attention matters to God. Yet it’s the essence of what Jesus was and is about. In Luke 10, we read a tale of two sisters, both friends of Jesus—one who wanted to be God’s tool, the other who yearned to be God’s vessel. [Read Luke 10:38-42]

In re-reading this story I noticed that Martha was a very generous person; she’s the sister who took the initiative to open their home to Jesus. So all who identify with Martha can take satisfaction in knowing that Mary wouldn’t have had the opportunity to sit at Jesus’ feet if it weren’t for Martha! Nonetheless, something was lacking in Martha’s relationship with Jesus. She was, as Jesus said, “distracted by all the preparations... worried and upset about many things, when only one thing is needed.” Jesus said that Mary’s choice to sit at His feet and listen had been the better choice and that choice “will not be taken away from her.” (Unless the church later convinced Mary to take on 5 volunteer positions!)

Real life demands that we struggle with being both Mary and Martha. But Jesus isn’t nearly as interested in what we can do for him as He is in us being with Him so He can fill us up! And the things that matter most get done best when we are spiritually centered and undistracted before Jesus, because His inflow of life makes for an outflow of love.

At a later point in their relationship, Jesus did a remarkable thing for the two sisters. John 11 tells us that when their brother Lazarus died, Jesus came to them, grieved with them, and raised Lazarus from the dead. It’s no surprise to hear what Mary did next. [Read John 12:1-3 from Bible]

¹Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ²Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive

perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

It's easy to criticize this "wasteful" gesture; Judas did. In verse 5 Judas complained that a pint of pure nard was worth 300 denarii—a year's wages—it should have been sold and given to the poor. In verse 6 the narrator questioned Judas' motives. But Judas asked a legitimate question. Why did Jesus allow for such "waste"?

Apparently Jesus was blessed by her act of worship. Verse 7 declares: *"Leave her alone... It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial."* Her extraordinary sacrifice of money, poured out in gratitude for Jesus' extraordinary gift of resurrection, was a foretaste of the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus would make on the cross, giving life to all. Jesus' death would be the greatest gift God could give; this is why Jesus went on to say, *"You will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me."*

Our first level of outflow is always directed towards God, grateful for what God has done in Christ, what the risen Christ is doing through the Holy Spirit, and what Christ will finish will He comes again. Even those of us who are wired like Martha must cease our activity and sit at Jesus' feet. It is only right that we bless God in worship, giving the Lord our best attention with His church each week. It is only right that the breath He gives becomes a joyful noise through a sacrifice of praise! It is only right that we bless God each morning with quiet time of meditation and prayer. It is only right to sit at the feet of Jesus in Bible study. Yes, time is precious...like fragrant nard, but God deserves our attention! And the Lord takes pleasure in our praise!

Here's the amazing thing—blessing God doesn't empty us, He's constantly refilling us. And the fragrance of the mutual outpouring will be alluring to people. Ever noticed that when you've been with someone who wears lots of perfume, you tend to take on the scent? Jesus is always with us, but when *we* are with Jesus, we take on His fragrance. People notice when there is an authentic spirituality that leads to humility and kindness. Our lives are more attractive to outsiders when they sense that we've been with Jesus. Who wants to become more like Martha? But when we're more like Mary, more centered, more genuine, more prayerful...even far-from-God people are drawn to that.

The fascinating thing is that becoming more like Mary is what makes us a blessing to the poor...the poor in spirit and the physically destitute. When Jesus said, *"You will always have the poor with you;* He wasn't indifferent. On the contrary! He was quoting Deuteronomy 15: 11:

There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.

God's people understood God's desire that they be generous to the needy. So as Mary poured out her life savings on His feet, Jesus may have envisioned how His death and resurrection would transform millions of grateful people, motivating us to pour ourselves out for the poor. Though poverty is a hole we can't fill, we nonetheless worship Jesus by continually opening our hands, pouring out our precious time and treasure to the poor. Our outflow to Him splashes down into outflow to neighbors. And despite the outflow, we still have what we need, because of His inflow.

I wonder what happened to Martha, whether she ever learned to set aside the distractions, sit at Jesus' feet, listen to what He says, and focus on that one thing that changes everything. The Bible doesn't say, but I envision that after His resurrection and the infilling of the Spirit, Martha became more like Mary. She retained her unique wiring; she kept that roll-up her sleeves, get-it-done, edge. But I see her learning to stop and say

“Jesus, fill ‘er up!” and becoming a woman of prayer, a person of praise, a vessel overflowing with love and joy, overflowing to God, then to family, then the friends and neighbors, and to the whole world. I imagine she took on the fragrance of Jesus. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. ¹⁵For we are to God the aroma of Christ...
(2 Cor. 2:14)

An aroma, a fragrance, is caused by molecules, disbursed in the air. Spiritual overflow results in small deeds of kindness that waft the fragrance of Jesus, the aroma of Christ. As page 85 of the Outflow book quotes Mother Teresa, “Not everyone can do great things, but everyone can do small things with great love.” That’s the fragrance of Christ. It’s a good smell...to everyone.

Today we have the privilege of communing with the risen Lord as we share the Lord’s Supper. Let’s push away the distractions, let’s be still and listen, always ready to receive the grace that makes us gracious.