

Fresh Start
Week 5: Living Water

When we think about a fresh start it reveals what we really believe about God. Does he allow for this sort of thing or are we so far in the hole because of past failures that he is going to just leave us to wallow in it? No, it's called love that demonstrates itself in grace. **Grace is unmerited favor. We get to start over. We get a mulligan, that's a forgiven bad shot in golf. God says, "let's erase the white board and go back and remind ourselves of what we know is true and start from there to rewrite the story."** We learn from all the left turns, but **they don't define us.** We learn from **COVID, divisive politics, and racial** and all kinds of injustice but **we start with a fresh response** to all of the brokenness and sin in the world around us.

What we have to do as Christ followers is **go back to the beginning and decide why we are here as a church, what do we value?** Those were the first couple of sermons. We are to be **ambassadors**, which means we are human bridges. We then **strategically build bridges** into our culture as Christ followers and together as a church. We went back and said that we value being **Real, Ready to be changed, Relational, and Release** to God what we most want to hold onto.

Last week and again today, we are **looking at a fresh start that begins with a better understanding of our calling.** That is our personal identity, Be, our purpose, Do, and our position, or Go.

If we are to look at our calling as Christ followers, we must answer this question, **"What is the end game or goal?"** How do we know if we are being successful? **...A Fresh Start means redefining success.**

Success is not personal fulfillment, that is a byproduct of operating in Be, Do, and Go. But the goal is much bigger than me. My part, my calling, is a part of something larger. **Making fulfillment as the goal, or the definition of success, we are making a big mistake.** That is a **moving target.** Usually when you get it or think you were about to get it, that's when that terrible thought enters your mind, **"is this all?"** It's like finding a **moving target in the fog.** You're really not sure what fulfillment is. **The other problem with it is that it is "me" focused.** My fulfillment doesn't have to be dependent on anyone else doing well. **It's very self absorbed and individualist.**

This is our definition of success as Christ followers. This is the end game.
²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. Ephesians 1:22-23

It's the church, God's people filling every corner of culture with the fullness of God. Like water being poured out, filling all of the cracks and crevices.

Obvious negative consequences for a follower to have this wrong view of success.

- **If we achieve financial success without dealing with our character flaws**
- **If I buy the lie that I will find fulfillment or happiness by not denying any of my physical urges. Addiction and using people physically...**
- **If I go to the right college, get the right job, and marry the right person, then I will be fulfilled.**

We've said it before, the average income of Americans has continued to go up and yet, according to research, we aren't any happier.

We are looking for something bigger than all of that. The something larger is that being a part of the fullness of God going into every nook and cranny of culture.

You want something bigger? Listen to this description of the church by Todd Wilson in the book "More." **"Yet we are promised that the church, in all its shortcomings, has that capacity. God gave it a sacred design with a sacred plan. The church is the most powerful movement in the history of the world with the capacity to fill everything in every way with the fullness of Christ."** 53

Keep in mind that this is not talking about an organization. It is talking about the body of Christ, the disciples of Jesus who are deployed by God into the world. It is not about what happens in a building on Sunday morning.

To see that new definition of success that is being a part of something larger that God is doing in the world. He is doing something right now that will extend into eternity.

1. The potential of my personal calling is connected to the fullness of Jesus in my community.

The impact I can have in the world around me is forever tied to understanding that it will only happen as a part of the fullness of Jesus.

The potential that is bottled up in you that God wants to unleash is only unleashed in its fullest within the Kingdom of God, or what God is doing to restore his loving rule in and around us. You cannot separate your calling in this world from what God is doing in it.

If you were around last week, this might look vaguely familiar. This is a way we can understand the idea of calling better. *Be, Do, Go pic*

Let's look again at the church. Here's a picture of the church, the powerful group of people becoming the fullness of God that spreads into the culture. This is how they prepared to go out and be the fullness of God.

⁴² All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.

⁴³ A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. ⁴⁴ And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. ⁴⁵ They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. ⁴⁶ They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— ⁴⁷ all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47

That's how it's supposed to be. Now here's what we tend to see today instead of the powerful picture we just read.

"They devoted themselves to vision clarity, organizational alignment, healthy teams, geographically based small groups, great preaching, monster outreach events, massive marketing campaigns, world class children's ministry, the best music in town, leadership development, new sites, and the latest growth strategy to break the next barrier. Some of the believers came together weekly for an excellent Sunday morning show; others opted for overbooked schedules of travel sports and long work hours to pay increasing debt, leaving no margin for living in common. With divorce, addictions, and crime rates similar to society at large, outsiders mocked the church, wondering why they should be part of something so judgmental, hypocritical, and irrelevant. Rather than praising God for the abundance of blessing and being the fullness of Christ in everything and in every way, church members spent their time praying for deliverance from the same crazy, empty lives as their outsider friends. When numbers were not added daily, they looked for the next silver bullet to catalyze growth and make the church more relevant. They desperately sought to do church without being the church."

That is not a picture of the fullness of God spilling into every crack and crevice of this world.

Let's look at how the fullness of God; his presence in this world is like water, living water. These are the words Jesus said to the **Samaritan woman** at the well. She came to the well to get water, which, without it, life cannot be sustained.

¹³ Jesus replied, "Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. ¹⁴ 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." John 4:13-14

In response to this statement, Jesus tells the woman stuff about her life that he couldn't know. She then runs to tell everyone about this man who told her all about herself, which most of it wasn't very good, and yet, he loved her.

Jesus doesn't simply promise this sinful woman living water, but he offers to make her a spring from which this living water can bubble up. It quenches and then remains and her life then produces it.

³⁷ On the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, "Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! ³⁸ Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.'" ³⁹ (When he said "living water," he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet entered into his glory.) John 7:37-39

Now this living water bubbling up within a person who trusts Jesus will become a river that flows from them. This living water flowing from them is the Holy Spirit, which is the presence of the resurrected Jesus.

This is what we are talking about, sinful people like you and me, who trust in Jesus and find their identity in him, the purpose for being here in him and the position that he has placed them to do his work become part of a great outpouring of living water that is to fill every nook and cranny of the culture around us. Water goes wherever gravity will take it. It flows, it seeps, it runs, oozing into every place.

We know the destructive power of water going wherever it wants to. But this is living water that brings eternal life! Can you picture it?

"When a group of people desperately pursuing God and his calling come together, they turn their individual contributions of living water into a

powerful flowing river. This is what God wants the church to be: the fullness of Jesus in us, flowing through us, to this generation." 59-60

Are you desperate enough to find your part of that powerful flowing river?

Don't make me read Matthew 16:18! It gets me too fired up. Maybe we should just skip this one. Nope.

Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. Matthew 16:18

Little old you, joining the river, could create the tipping point...

Those drops don't become a river unless we are...**2. Owning your part.**

Here are a couple of people who I see owning their part as living water that is a part of a river covering all of our culture.

Shella Bishop, an unassuming grandmother who had brain surgery a few years ago. It's been a struggle. She had been working in Target, where she attracted many 20-somethings to her kindness and wisdom and love. She took a **spiritual gifts inventory** in the Come and See Class. Do you know what her top gift was? It was wisdom. She couldn't believe it because **she doesn't know the Bible like the back of her hand** and she's never gone to Bible College. No one could do her part at Target and now with her grandkids. **She is owning her part** of the river of living water.

Bob Cline thought we were all wet starting a coffee shop in the Mall. But he decided to check it out. Now it is a regular part of his week. He knows all of the old guys who come there early for coffee. He even agreed to open early for them. He is sharing his life and his relationship with Jesus with them. No one can be what Bob is at the mall, except for Bob. **He is owning his part of the river of living water.**

You can't give up responsibility for something that God is calling you to be his presence in the world to an institution. We can't delegate to an institution that which has been given to us by God.

"The power and brilliance of God's design for the church is a relational community, focused on mission and functioning like a family, with every member owning and living out their personal proxy." 65-66

Proxy is the authority to represent someone else. We have been given this by God, making us his ambassadors.

Giving up personal proxy for institutional proxy. **The delegation stopped with Jesus.**

Listen to this list of gifts that God gives to his people, his church. ¹¹ Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the **apostles**, the **prophets**, the **evangelists**, and the **pastors and teachers**. ¹² Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. ¹³ This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-13

So what happens if the people who are called to play these roles in the community, delegate that role to the institution with its professionals and it's programs?

That's like the adult who complains about the programs of the church not attracting people or giving them what they think they need. It's like a student complaining about how the youth ministry isn't impacting their school or students' lives. That is an adult and a student giving up their personal proxy to an organization.

"Ok, well, I'm none of those so I'm off the hook. I pay my tithe; attend 1.5 times a month and invite people to come meet those to whom I have delegated.

What is the difference between a soldier fighting a war on foreign soil and one who is fighting in his backyard? It's passion, resolve, and desperation. The colonial soldiers fight with passion, because it is his home and territory he is fighting for while the British soldiers are just trying to make it back home alive.

3. Trusting the Guide.

Who is our guide in finding our part in this river of living water? Let's go to the source, Jesus.

¹⁵ "If you love me, obey my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another **Advocate**, who will never leave you. ¹⁷ **He is the Holy Spirit**, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, **because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him**. But you know him, because he lives with you now and **later will be in you**. John 14:15-17

Parakletos...advocate, summoned to one's side, pleads one's case, intercessor

He leads you into truth, reminds us of the things Jesus said.

“With you now” (Jesus speaking of himself) later will be “in you” is the Holy Spirit. This means that the Holy Spirit is the presence of Jesus. Do you get it? If you are one in whom Christ dwells, which is his Holy Spirit, then where you go, you take the fullness of all that God is. It’s in you. It’s living water. And you live in his unshakable kingdom, which is that living water spreading everywhere.

That is something that I want to be a part of, but I have to trust that what is in me, even as flawed as I am, is the fullness of God, Jesus.

One day Deb calls me to come meet Tammy Skully. She is talking about how God is telling her to move to Midland and devote two years to Cultivate. I’m thinking either, she’s really hearing from God and ready to radically trust him, or she’s a crazy person. I met with them and found her to be lucid, normal, and passionate about trusting her future calling to God. She moved here without a job, well... without a paying job.

Fresh off a master’s degree from U of M, she pulls up stakes and moves to midland. She has learned the ministry from Deb and is doing what Bob is doing, building relationships with the people at the mall. She is also preparing to start a resource center in Beaverton, which is Cultivate 2.0.

She had to trust the guide, the Holy Spirit. She took the initial step to meet with us. We then confirmed to her that what she thought was the Holy Spirit speaking, actually was. Then she made the trip again with all her belongings to a new city where she knew no one and had no job. That’s trust.

Steps to a Fresh Start

1. Take a spiritual gifts inventory.

Contact Tammy at the church office and she can walk you through how to do that. It is online so you can do it at home. If you don’t have Internet at home you can come into the office and Tammy can walk through it with you. This is the first step; it’s not the “be all, end all” of finding clarity on your calling. There are other Spiritual Gifts tests out there, but this one is specifically designed for churches and is more scientific in that how you answer a question takes you to the right next question.

If you’ve already done your inventory, please get with Tammy to go over it and keep moving across the bridge.

2. Reflect on your sweet spot with others.

If you are in a bridge group, that is perfect, or any other small group or class.

This is a great time to look at our Be, Do, and Go because the mission field or location is changing. We are finding a new normal as we hope COVID fades. Some of you are **entering into new seasons in your life.** That changes where you are being sent to be the fullness of Christ.