

Flowing Out

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A young businessman had just set up his own company. He rented an office downtown and bought fashionable furniture to impress visitors. One morning, he spotted someone entering the outer office. Hoping to appear important, he grabbed the phone and pretended to be in a heated conversation.

“Offer them no more than three million dollars!” he shouted into the receiver. “And tell them that if the job’s not done by next week, they won’t get a penny!” After he slammed the phone down, he smiled confidently and asked, “Hello! Can I help you?” The visitor replied, “Yes, I’m from the phone company. I’ve come to connect your line.”

We’ve all felt the temptation to show off to prove our worth or seem more capable than we feel. But the Gospel calls us not to show off, but to *flow out*. There is a world of difference between the two. Showing off tries to impress others with power. Flowing out, however, lets grace move through us. It’s not loud, but it’s life-giving. The businessman wanted to seem powerful, but his phone wasn’t connected. A church can be like that, too. We might look busy, but if grace isn’t flowing through us, we’re just pretending to talk on a disconnected line.

Today’s readings from Isaiah and John invite us to restore that living connection to be filled, to follow, and to flow out into the world.

Isaiah 49 gives us a portrait of God’s servant whose life is shaped for mission. Verse 2 says, “*In the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away.*”

Before the arrow is sent, it is hidden in the quiver. Before water flows, it gathers in the reservoir. Epiphany reminds us that God’s illumination comes gradually. The star didn’t suddenly cover the sky; it guided the magi step by step. Likewise, God’s servants are shaped in hidden places: prayer, quiet study, and simple acts of care. These are not wasted time; they are sacred preparation.

In our congregation, we might sometimes feel small or unseen in the shadow of a busy suburban world. But that doesn't mean we aren't being used by God. God often hides the polished arrow, waiting for the right moment. Some of the most powerful ministries happen in kitchens, hospital visits, or whispered prayers.

The temptation for churches today is to measure success by visibility: attendance numbers or flashy programs. Yet Isaiah reminds us that there's a holy stage of being hidden in God's hand. This is the season to be refined. Think about a reservoir. If it never collects water, no flow can come out of it. Our prayer gatherings and conversations after worship are ways God fills our community. They might look small, but they are vital parts of the great river of grace.

In our Gospel reading, John the Baptist sees Jesus and cries out, "Look, the Lamb of God!" Two of his disciples hear him and immediately follow Jesus. It's a simple movement from *look* to *follow*.

Notice how John doesn't try to keep them for himself. He doesn't say, "Stay with me; I've built this ministry." Instead, he points them away from himself toward the source of life. That's the pattern of true flow. Grace moves through us. John could have "shown off" his success as a preacher, but he knew his role was to bear witness, not to be the center.

In a congregation like ours, this hits home. We love one another deeply, and our fellowship is a gift. But if all our energy stays inside these walls, the current stops. The gospel becomes a closed pool instead of a flowing river. So how do we "flow out" without "showing off"? Sometimes it's as simple as listening to a neighbor. It might be inviting a friend to worship, not to boast about our church, but to share the peace we've found here. It might be offering a prayer at the grocery checkout or showing kindness in traffic.

When we flow out like that, something wonderful happens. People begin to "come and see," just as Andrew did. They come not because of a performance, but because of a quiet beauty that draws them. Remember: showing off is about us; flowing out is about God's love through us. The Spirit's current doesn't need a loud motor; it travels by gentle persistence, one heart at a time.

Isaiah 49:6 says, *“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob... I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”*

What a bold statement! God says that restoring one nation isn’t enough. The calling is larger and deeper. The grace must reach “to the end of the earth.” That’s the delta, the point where the river fans out and touches the sea. The delta is where the river completes its journey, releasing life wherever it goes. God’s purpose for us is not to be self-contained, but to be a blessing that flows outward.

When we gather for worship, we’re like the source of a river. But the flow can’t stop at the sanctuary doors. God longs for our prayers to become acts of love, and for our peace to ripple into our workplaces and neighborhoods. If faith stays bottled up, it stagnates.

John Wesley once said, “The gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness.” Faith that doesn’t flow outward into love of neighbor isn’t really faith. Flowing out is not a show of power. Even Jesus chose a humble way: born in a manger, walking dusty roads, washing feet. He embodied the gentle flow of divine grace.

Whenever the church forgets that humility and starts showing off, boasting in status or influence, it loses its way. Real power is quiet. Think of how water shapes rock, not by force, but by steady flow. That’s how love transforms hearts.

As we prepare to honor the life of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. tomorrow, his witness reminds us vividly of what it means to flow out rather than show off. Dr. King did not seek fame or position; he sought faithfulness. He allowed the power of divine love to move through him like a steady current, challenging hatred not with violence, but with redemptive love.

He once said, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” Dr. King’s life was a sermon in motion, a river of compassion flowing through injustice, carving new channels of hope for this nation.

That same Spirit calls us to let the waters of justice and mercy flow from our lives into our words, our choices, our care for others, so that the love of Christ may continue to heal a divided world.

So here's the invitation for us this week: to become living streams of grace. Maybe that means spending time in prayer before rushing into action, allowing God to refill the reservoir. Maybe it means speaking a kind word when we'd rather stay silent. Maybe it's forgiving someone, letting grace flow where bitterness once stood.

Flowing out takes patience and trust. The world tells us to "make an impression," but the Spirit whispers, "Make a difference." When Jesus invites the disciples in John 1:39, he says, "Come and see." That's the essence of our mission. Not to argue, but to invite.

Invite people to see what grace looks like in action. Invite them to see how love can move quietly and still change everything. Invite them to see how the light of Christ flows through even the smallest church in simple acts of kindness.

This week, find one "outflow point," one way you can let God's grace extend beyond yourself. Maybe it's a conversation, a letter, or an offering of time. Trust that even a trickle can start a stream, and that stream, in God's hands, can become a river.

The mission of Christ will not stop at the sanctuary. It is "too light a thing" for our faith to stay here. It must flow outward, into homes, hospitals, and hearts, until every corner of creation is touched by love's tide.

So, let's not be like the businessman pretending to have a connection when the line isn't live. Let's be people truly connected to God, to one another, and to the world God loves. May our lives not show off power, but flow out grace. May our church not seek prestige, but presence. And may every word and every prayer become part of the holy river that flows from the heart of God into the heart of the world. Amen.