

A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church

By Burt L. Burleson

“DaySpring Streams”

Acts 11: 19-30

September 9, 2007

Awkward.....

It kind of feels like the time Janice Edwards, my high school girl friend, saw me flirting with Susan Younger in upstairs A Hall outside the drama class... you can tell when talking isn't just talking. I wasn't just talking and she saw me... When I saw her the next time after fourth period my tail was a little bit between my legs.

As I've seen you, I've had the impulse to say, "I'm sorry." I know somehow that's all wrong and it's not what you want to hear but I've felt the need to say it. "I'm sorry."

But you... DaySpring... Did not respond as Janice did, thank goodness. You have been so gracious... And more than that, you have been wise and thoughtful and curious friends... You have been understanding... and so kingdom-minded. Most of all, I think you have been trusting. And I can't begin to tell you how very much this has meant to me and to my wife and my children and my parents.

You have walked with me in these days in a process that's not typical for a pastor leaving a church... and it'll come to a conclusion this week and... likely we will as a church be in a transition.

What we think on together in this hour is always important, but I think it takes on even more significance in these days. Because change is change and none of it ever comes without the possibility of some challenge and some grief and some choppy waters to navigate.

Our maturity will be needed...

Our best and most "authentic selves."

A perspective that is true... clear... and common.

So, I want to try to help us with that in these days.

We need to do some seeing and seeing together... a collective seeing... all sharing the same perspective. We must see DaySpring and see it together.

And for today, I'd like to invite you to see what I see – and what I've seen. Seeing is the most important thing a pastor does... the eyes of the body... so to speak. And I want you to see with me what is here, DaySpring in all its diversity. That's why I wanted us to read about that Antioch church because like Antioch was, we are a fairly diverse place. There are a lot of things converging here.

Antioch was that way... It was the third largest city in the empire, probably about a half million people... There north of Judea... still a good bit north of Galilee on the edge of the Mediterranean.

It was sort of like Houston... A place of commerce...

Entertainment... the capital for chariot racing (for real)

Religion... a great goddess temple was there.

Folks from all over the map found themselves there and subsequently in that community of faith. People from Asia Minor... Cyprus... North Africa... Niger... It was genuinely cosmopolitan. People and things and ideas were converging there.

Like they have here.

And I want us to see together what has converged at DaySpring. I think you need to see it. We all do... and it's not easy. Some of us can... sort of see the big picture... but most of us primarily see through our own experience. You sort of just "flowed" into this place and here you are.

I want to talk to you about how you flowed here... because you didn't all flow into this in the same way... by the same stream... you didn't, and you may not know that.

See, if I sat down with you in your boat, and I asked you about it, I'd hear different things from different people in different boats. "Why are you floating here in the DaySpring river?"

I'd hear various things... different things. Some of you say things like... "I was tired of everything being so loud." I hear that a lot.

Some of you... in a lot of boats (and I find this very curious) will use this phrase. "I've been able to breath." Some maybe exhaling, some inhaling... but breathing.

If I get out of those boats and into some others, some of you of you would point to our confessional nature. "I like that this church is settled on the core of the Christian faith."

From other boats I hear things about the scriptures... studying them together... reading them with care.

Some talk about liturgy. "I really needed something more formal and liturgical." Others talk about the people. "It was the open and genuine, non-judgmental community. I needed grace." It depends on the boat.

For some, it's the praying... the contemplation.

For others, the broad conversation...

For others, the connection to the Church Tradition.

Some of you just think it's so cool that we mow our own lawn or that we don't have services on Sunday night.

Lots of you love the piano player... and a couple thought it was pretty cool that I could get the deer to come up to the window while I preach. (I've got the feeder set to go off at 11:45).

My point is that no two conversations in any two boats are the same. But not all of us are aware of that... just floating along in our boat... and sometimes folks in other boats float up next to you and you say, "Hmmm, never seen a boat like that. What are they doing floating in our stream?" You're asking that because you're in a boat... in a stream and your stream has converged with some other streams... but because the river is sort of wide, you may not see that. It's a matter of perspective.

So, what I want you to do for a moment is get out of your boat and get in a hot air balloon with me. It's a big one... trust me, it'll hold us all, and rise up high enough where we can see all the streams. Everyone get in the same hot air balloon... change your perspective. Go up about 1,000 feet and you'll see five streams flowing into the river that is DaySpring. And here they are...

Let's call one... moderate Baptist. Another stream running pretty near to that one, let's call conservative evangelical. There's another stream that you look down and see and it's called the contemplative stream. Another, let's call the early church stream... and the fifth let's call a missional stream.

Now... just kind of sit there in that balloon way up high and look out over all that. Five streams... some running near one another... some not so near and then we all look and see that at this one place, in some fullness of time... they dramatically converge, right there, at 7900 Renewal Way. See that?

Now... get out of the balloon and go with me to a map room. Everyone get around the table. We'll have to squeeze in but we can do it because we all need to see. I want you to see what I see. Look at this map... it's a map of all the religious waters. When we do that, what we'll see is that these streams go way back... prior to the time any of us was on the planet. We'll see them running through time, through the Church, merging here and there, branching off here and there, criss-crossing... all of them are flowing through history into this place.

You moderate Baptist are looking at the map and you see your stream branching off turbulently in the 16th century... and you see folks navigating around religious liberty and freedom to say yes to God (or no) without any coercion.

And you conservative evangelicals... look down and see the 17th century. There's your stream. And folks floating on it who championed biblical authority and a personal faith, some experience that changed and warmed them. And there's a lot of personal and social morality.

And you mystics... the stream is pretty thin and hard to even find on the map at times but you finally put your finger on it and you find that it takes you back, back, back... it's always been around. ... Often way out in some desert but always there.

You early church types don't have to look so hard... your orthodox stream is large and in the center usually. Lots of familiar boats floating there.

You folks who are missional see your stream emerging in powerful ways, criss-crossing all through the ecclesiastic landscape. Everything from Lottie Moon to Martin Luther King, to liberation theology. On back into the 17th Century with Judson... and on back into the Catholic missions into all the world... and to the early church who turned the world upside down because of the way they cared for the poor.

Now look... see that all these streams are flowing and flowing here to DaySpring on that map we're all looking at. They're converging.

And let's make another change of perspective. Leave the map room and go with me down the highway to the Seventh-Day Adventist Church building... back about 1995. And amazingly enough, every one of these streams is there... they were all sort of trickling together...puddling a bit... looking for some way to flow.

Katy Stokes, the consummate mystic, was married to George Stokes, who was described by his daughter Polly as "just right of Attila the Hun."

Gene and Cindy Evans... and Susan Josephs were poster children for moderate Baptist life. Raised in traditional Baptist culture, they had spent their adult lives resisting the narrowness of fundamentalism, pointing to historic Baptist faith as their reason for doing so.

Kris and Charlie Olson and others were so very missional... their love for God was measured by whether or not anything had changed for those who were on the margins. "Is anything better, out there, because of my faith, in here?"

And we had conservatives. Ed Mays – an old Texas Baptist. One founding member once told me that she was an inerrantist and that if the fundamentalist weren't so mean, she'd be one.

And there was Pat Kaiser... who gave voice to the early church confessional tradition saying, "Do we have to come to church and question everything every time. Aren't there some things that should be settled?" And their answer early on was, "Yes." Then I showed up in the little kayak that could... and I just paddled back and forth alongside. We knew and saw one another... didn't see so much the boats or streams but one another... and we sort of moseyed on down this current we found ourselves in. And now there is quite a flow and quite a bit of energy... and it's really fun and refreshing and the water is moving us along pretty fast. But you need... we need to be aware, now especially in this time, of all the streams. DaySpring, the river that is, is not one thing. You might disagree with me... but... you'd be wrong. And it's important that we see that and value the fresh water flowing in from every stream.

It can be so very life giving and it seemed to be in Antioch... and lets make one last point in our perspective and all of us go to Antioch together. There are some things we'll see there that can help us to continue to enjoy the flow and capture the energy of this.

Are you in Antioch now? Imagine that ancient church. I just want to point out a few things that need to be remembered in the coming days.

First of all, would you notice that these believers were in Antioch because they had been scattered... chased out from Jerusalem by spear. Jerusalem was home for the Church and things got bad politically and they had to leave... had to... probably didn't want to. But they did and some of these folks that were scattered wound up in Antioch. And word got around that there were a few of them in town and they had a meeting... probably seemed pretty lame up next to Pentecost.

And no one could preach like Peter or John but someone gave a little devotion and they read the scriptures... and decided that they should keep meeting. They didn't look like much but they were, after all, the Church. And it wasn't long before God did amazing things... and it all started with something painful... they were upended and de-centered. They were scattered.

We have been too... some of us from homes and places far away that we miss. And people we miss.

Some of us from brokenness in other churches...

Or in our families.

Some of us have gone through tragedies and it has scattered us... busted our lives and thrown bits and pieces of us here and there. Or maybe we just got scattered from ourselves... lots were scattered from the faith.

And God didn't cause it... but God has sure used it. Didn't seem like much early on... but, "O my gosh, what God has done." God's best stuff happens when we have been unsettled. All of us bring our scattered lives here and it is our vulnerability that God has used.

Just like in Antioch... there they were... so open and because of that they shared the faith with the Greeks. See that and see it together. It's really the first time the Church had done this. There they were, in Antioch and we don't know why but they were open in a new way to folks who were different than they were. This is the first church that opened its doors to those who were different.

Were they nervous about it? Probably! "Is this right, is this okay? Should we be asking more questions as folks come in... maybe make sure they can at least quote the ten commandments or something. Perhaps ask them to consider giving up pork." They didn't give into those anxieties... The gospel trumped all that.

The streams that are converging here have not always converged so happily... historically speaking. They've created some serious white water. People, fallen people, got anxious and angry and arrogant and very tired... and didn't stay open to the Other... to the one who was different than they were. It was too hard. Staying open isn't easy.

Let's take a moment and think together about being open in here.

How many of you have joined in the last three years? How many were members when we built this building? Do you know one another?

How many of you are under 30? Over 50? Do you know someone older or younger yet?

How many of you grew up in some tradition other than Baptist? Is this an open place.

Are you left of center, theologically speaking... right? Are you open to one another?

Are you a guest today? Hope this place is open.

Antioch opened up and something new happened.

So... Barnabus shows up... this icon of maturity and grace... Paul gets most of the press... but Barnabus is my hero. Barnabus, did you know, was the only one willing to go talk to Paul after his conversion. Everyone else still hated him. Or they were afraid it was a set up... he's not really one of us. Not Barnabus... he went to him. Just went and got to know him.

And then later, he parts ways with Paul because Paul has punted on John Mark... Paul won't let him go with them on their next journey because John Mark had let them down... went home early. Paul was done with him... "Quitter!" And the encouraging one, Barnabus said, "I think I'll give him another chance. And John Mark and I will do what we can do for God.

He is mature and in this time of change in the Church, they trusted in the mature ones. See that and see that together.

When Barnabus got to Antioch, Luke says, "He saw what the grace of God had done." Pretty simple, huh. There's no... "He was so impressed by the leadership... or so taken by the charismatic preaching..." Luke gives us no names initially... it was just faithful people and God was doing something. Now – everyone look at this... look at us.

I really like what is happening here... I think it's right for this time and this place... and I think it's very exciting... but if you're here thinking, "Look what Burt has done or Kurt has done" or "My, my, what we have done" instead of saying, "Look what the grace of God has done," Houston, we've got a problem.

And its such a subtle shift from receiving something as a gift to worshipping it and then protecting it... with the goodness comes the temptation. It's a gift.

And I should just say, with no false humility... we didn't plan this. It's not like we said eight or nine years ago, "If we'll just sing songs this way or have a chart or read from the lectionary we'll become trendy and lots of folks will show up."

Some of it was blind luck... and look what the grace of God did with that. And those folks who were there back then put up with some preaching that I can't bear to read now... and look what God's grace did with that. Luke names it properly... he saw what God's grace, not a doctrine, a reality flowing from God's heart had done.

See this... Barnabus went up north and got Paul. He was sort of a one-man search committee. He was just thinking, "Who does this church need now?" and Paul came to mind... he was what they needed next.

And the last thing I want us to see from this ancient perspective, and we didn't read this far... but someone prophesied about a famine in Jerusalem and they collected an offering and sent it to Jerusalem in anticipation of their hunger. How 'bout that? Jerusalem sends some folks from headquarters to check them out, make sure they're kosher and Antioch sends food back to them. It's something, that they never saw themselves justified in thumbing their noses at the Jerusalem Church... even when it was getting all conservative and controlling. They stayed connected to that service. But they also did, out of faithfulness to Christ, what became their instinct. They SENT. Antioch, as you probably know, became the sending place... the hub of the Christian mission.

See... See... they realized early on that it wasn't about them... or their little band of believers. It's about the world and the kingdom of God and so things just kept flowing through that place. It wasn't theirs...

It's not ours... let it flow. It's not about us... get in the flow.

Streams have to keep flowing, they must keep emptying themselves into something larger or they will in fact puddle up and become stagnant and die. Streams only live by releasing what they are into what is beyond them. Streams only live by releasing what they are into what is beyond them. We only live by releasing who we are into the One greater than we are. Amen.