

Acts 2:43-47

Go with the Flow

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*Imagine you're getting ready to go on a trip to Europe. Although you've seen parts of Europe in photos and on television, you know that seeing things in person will be a completely different experience. You're particularly excited to begin the trip in one of the most inspiring capitals of the continent—the magnificent city of Paris. As soon as you arrive in Paris, you're overwhelmed by the grandeur and beauty of the historic city. The sights, smells, and sounds are like nothing you have ever experienced. Everywhere you look there is something new to capture your imagination. Scanning the view from left to right, you're surrounded by beautiful buildings. Famous museums and churches beckon for you to absorb the stories of their rich past, while centuries-old hotels and city buildings exude majesty and history. As you pass by them, you're amazed by the elaborate architectural designs and the ornate details. Between two of the buildings, you catch a glimpse of the Eiffel tower in the distance. Seeing it for the first time in person, your eyes widen and your senses feel wide awake. Although it looks small from where you are, the incredible height of the tower becomes clear as you walk toward it. Standing a block from the tower, you're overwhelmed by the sheer size and grandeur of the structure. The intricately woven beams of steel rise high from the ground, and you feel completely dwarfed standing next to it. You look up, but you can't even see the top. The magnitude of the tower is enormous and it feels even more amazing being there in person than you could have ever imagined. The metal beams rising from the ground are larger than the biggest tree trunks you've ever seen. You touch them: As your hands come in contact with the cold metal, you feel the presence of something greater than yourself, not

just physically, but in human history. You can't believe that something so tremendous was built by man.

You take the elevator to the top. During the ride you can't help but think back to the first time you saw the Grand Canyon—that moment when everything around you stops as you try to comprehend what's in front of you. Finally, the elevator doors begin to open, and there it is—Paris all around you. As you take in the overwhelming sight, your mouth opens and you catch your breath. The famed City of Lights stretches for miles in all directions around you, yet from this vantage point the hustle and bustle below cease to exist. You lose yourself in the beauty of the sight. (https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/awe_story) You feel it.

*Or maybe you've felt it while snorkeling, as you looked off to one side, there they were, a pair of sea turtles swimming gracefully, completely unaware of your presence, just a few feet away.

*Or maybe you felt it looking up at the giant sequoias in a northern California forest or

*looking out over the San Francisco Bay, surprised by the seals sunning themselves on the rocks.

*Maybe when you think about the vastness of space or glance up at the sky and see a shooting star or super moon, you feel it then.

Or maybe you feel it when you see a young person offer up a seat to a complete stranger or when you witness other sacrificial acts of compassion.

*My friend, Connie, said she felt it when, after spending hours hooked up to a machine, donating stem cells for her sister who has leukemia, she went upstairs to her sister's hospital room just in time to watch the nurse hang the IV bag of her stem cells on the IV pole next to her sister's bed.

Picture Earth at the center of a frame. The planet looks unassuming, a fleck, its blue-and-white marbling stark against a black interstellar backdrop. In that moment, astronauts report feeling it, many have said it has changed how they think about God and their own purpose in the world.

*The emotion is awe. And, psychologists say it plays an important role in bolstering happiness, health and our social interactions — and it may explain how and why humans get along and ultimately cooperate with one another. You see, we are the only living creatures who experience it. Awe is that feeling we have when we are in the presence of something way bigger than ourselves. These are the moments that make believing in a loving, creative, big God, really easy. In fact, awe may very well be one of the most spiritually significant emotions that we experience. Awe reminds us that the things we believe about God are based on our lived experiences.

But, as wonderful as it is to feel awe, I've observed that we allow it to slip away from us quickly. We move past it so we can tend to what we consider more important things. We let it touch us for a moment, but we often we don't let it soak into our souls and change us or the way we live our lives. It's there and it's gone.

So today, I want us to begin with awe.

On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit of God made herself known to Jesus followers in the rushing of the wind and what seemed like flames hovering above them. All at once, the people gathered were able to understand each other even though they spoke different languages. Peter stood among them and preached a sermon which clearly would have been the envy of every preacher...ever.

More people joined the movement that day. According to the author of Acts (who also wrote the Gospel of Luke), the community went from

120 to 3000 people. Can you imagine that? I mean...I can't, not even in my wildest, rock-star preacher dreams can I imagine preaching a sermon that resulted in that kind of growth. They grew from an intimate community of believers to a mega church, "just like that." Honestly, as much as I would like to imagine that Peter, or any preacher, could make that happen, I know it was not Peter. I know it was God. It was the Spirit of God, stirring in the hearts and minds of the people. It was the Spirit of God that sparked that incredible momentum which, I am certain, felt miraculous. Here's what happened next:

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⁴³ Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

"Awe came upon everyone." What the people experienced in this time and place, what they felt as a result of their experiences, changed them and compelled them to live differently. This different way of living was dependent on each individual sharing what was theirs and contributing to the common good, realizing that what was best for the community ultimately was best for each one of them individually. This snapshot of their life together is a story of abundance, belonging, and joy.

If we were to continue reading in Acts, we would learn that there were multiple communities of Jesus followers and they were not all alike. They were everything from an offshoot of their parents' faith tradition to a radical sect. They were a tentative gathering and a street festival, a subversive activity and a public forum, a new current within Judaism

and a new, distinct and separate religion. As fabulous as the picture in chapter 2 of Acts sounds, these communities were not perfect by any stretch of the imagination. There were arguments and accusations. There were a lot of bumps in the road, but we are evidence that these tenacious, courageous followers of Jesus kept going, refusing to give up, even when they disappointed each other, even when it seemed the kin-dom of God was definitely not at hand. I think it had to be the occasional moments of awe, the moments when it was so easy to see God in one another, and in their experiences, that inspired them to stick with the ways of Jesus. Those moments made it all worth it.

Have you witnessed those kinds of moments here, in our life together? I wonder if that isn't what keeps all of us going, inspiring us to continue this messy, sometimes hard work, the hope we have in those occasional glimpses of awe.

*After the Pride worship service that we hosted this summer, one of our guests said to me, "This was the worship service I've waited for my whole life."

*On Easter, we celebrated new life by being reminded that nothing says HOPE like a little bit of confetti and a whole lot of laughter.

*In May, our choir gathered at beloved DCC member, Treva Wiseman's house, shortly before she died, at her request, to sing "Amazing Grace" to her.

*Two weeks ago, this communion table was filled to overflowing with bread carried in by some of the young people in our church. Some of us hung around afterward to graze.

*Earlier this week, I went to see Lisa Martinez and her sweet baby, Ian. While I was there, she told me how grateful she is that Ian will get to know all of us, how glad she is that she came to church that first time.

What we are doing here together matters, not only to us, but to our neighbors, some of whom will never step foot in this church. And that's okay. We will continue to be a voice for justice on their behalf, we will be a safe place for questions and doubt, we will keep welcoming anyone who seeks to love and be loved. We will keep making God's love known in this world because that is the only thing that matters.

And, friends, it matters that we do it together. That's what we've been talking about as we have explored Eric Law's book, *Holy Currencies: 6 Blessings of Sustainable, Missional Ministries*. The book continues to remind me that we have so much, each one of us and collectively. In the last few weeks, we've talked about some of what we have, what Law calls "currencies."

*He uses the word "currency" a little more broadly than we are accustomed to using it, identifying 6 separate, but connected, currencies that flow through healthy, thriving churches. All of these currencies, he says, must continually be exchanged for one another, forming what he calls a "cycle of blessings."

*These currencies should be like water, like a fountain or a mountain stream or waterfall, constantly moving, always bringing life and sustaining life. We have all seen what happens when water doesn't flow; it breeds disease and causes things to rot. Think stagnant, mosquito-attracting water, the kind that smells really bad and rots wood or causes mold. The same kind of thing happens with currency. When we hold tight to what is "mine," hoarding it for ourselves, those resources don't have the opportunity to bring life but, instead, they do nothing, they stagnate, even deteriorate. They have no value then,

because it is the flowing of the currencies that gives them value. It is only when a currency is exchanged for something else that it has worth.

It probably isn't so hard to figure out that when all of the currencies are freely flowing, there is this wonderful easiness about things. There is abundance, the church is able to do what it is called to do and there is gratitude and joy, kind of like the snapshot of the early Jesus followers I talked about earlier.

*It probably isn't hard to imagine, too, that when there is a deficit of one of the currencies or one is missing entirely, flow stops and things grind to a halt, like a stream that has been interrupted by the hard work of a beaver.

*In the life of the church, when any one of the 6 currencies Law has identified stops flowing, it can't help but negatively affect the ministry of the church. I can honestly say that, while money isn't any more or less important than the other currencies, in the church we seem to get more anxious about money than we do anything else. Coupled with that, we don't like to talk about money. Anxiety and avoidance-perfect! One reason we steer clear of money conversations at church is that many of us really are just plain anxious about money period, at home, at church, at school, at work. Did you know, the number one reason marriages end is money? Even fairly functional families struggle to have honest conversations about college expenses and student debt because...money.

And the other reason we react the way we do to talking about money in church is that I think our minds instantly go to the televangelist who tells his or her viewers that God will answer their prayers if they will only open their hearts...and wallets. We do not want anyone to think God gives preferential treatment to people with money. That's just icky and wrong.

Well, I am not a televangelist. I am your minister, who you pay with your hard-earned money to tell the truth, to the world and to you. And the truth is, every member of this church needs to give money to the church, not because God will answer your prayers if you do. But because this church and the work we do together are the answers to someone else's prayers. We are the answer to someone's prayer for a safe place to be loved and accepted. We are the answer to someone's prayer for a full belly or a roof over their head. We are the answer to a teenager's prayers for a youth group that affirms their sexual orientation and gender identity. We are the answer to a mother's prayer for a village to help her raise her child. We are the answer to the prayers of our neighbors whose cries for justice have fallen on deaf ears, whose school lunch accounts are overdrawn, who are afraid of what's next and worried they will face it alone, who haven't found their purpose, who can't believe in a God that sends people to hell and who want desperately to believe that love will ultimately win.

Quite simply, we can't be what they need us to be without giving money to the church. The same is true for the other currencies as well. For example, we can't do the work we need to do if we follow the norm for churches, which is 20% of the people doing 80% of the work. A few weeks ago, I suggested we all fill out a time inventory so we could see in black and white how we spend our time and reflect on whether or not our schedules reflect our priorities. I wonder...what could we do if everyone in this room committed just 2 hours a week, beyond worship, to the church. 2 hours allows time to sing in the choir or teach Sunday School, to clean out a closet, weed a flower bed, or move that branch by the garage that the mowers have been mowing around for a month. It would be enough time to haul away the recycling, bake communion bread, or bake cookies for the coffee bar. Time. We value our time and because we do, we should use it for the thing that matters, making God's love known.

So, here's the thing, this church belongs to all of us. When we join the church, we say yes to being in this together. What we have together, as members is called a covenant. That covenant helps us shoot for that Acts 2 vision, sharing what we have for the good of this faith community and our larger community. We promise to share the responsibilities that come with it. We are responsible for the maintenance of the building and grounds. We are responsible for paying our staff, for keeping financial commitments to our community partners, for providing a safe place for our children and youth. And all of that takes money. Your money. My money. If we believe in the mission and vision of the church, and the core values listed on the front of the bulletins we will all do our part. And if those moments of awe, when it's so clear who God is, matter to us, and sharing them with other people matters to us, we will let those moments change us and change the world.

I can't wait to see what we do together in 2020. Commit to it today.
Amen.