

"LET THE FLOOD BEGIN"
Malachi 3:9-11; John 7:37-39

Have any of you ever experienced a flood? The week before Easter we kept seeing on TV and reading about the massive flooding where Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut were declared emergencies, closing roads and sandbagging low-lying areas as storms pounded the Northeast. Providence, Rhode Island had 16.32 inches of rain by Wednesday, March 31st.

But have you ever experienced a flood? I have. It was the summer of 1972, June 17th-24th to be exact, between my sophomore and junior years of high school. A number of us from my high school basketball team had gone down to Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania for their basketball camp. Now the coach running this camp was a fellow by the name of Coach John Swogger from Altoona, PA. who was well known throughout Pennsylvania High School Basketball. And coach Swogger was known to run a very disciplined, hard basketball camp and so we all knew

we were in for a real treat. We arrived and started right in. But it just so happened that the rains started. And all week as we walked back and forth from the dormitory to the cafeteria to the field house it rained. We ate, slept and played basketball and by the time we were told to go to bed all we wanted to do was sleep and rest our weary bones. I remember looking over the hill and seeing the Beaver River, which empties into the Ohio River and thinking it was rising unusually fast. We knew that there were reports of flooding in the area but we were not watching any TV or reading any newspapers, just playing basketball all week. It wasn't until that Saturday, when our parents came to pick us up, that we got the full report of all the flooding that had occurred in and around Pittsburgh. As a matter of fact, we had to go home a different route, not the usual Ohio River Blvd., due to the flooding on the main road that went from Beaver Falls to my home just outside of Pittsburgh. I remember once home, watching the news and going with a few friends as close to the Ohio River as we were allowed and seeing

recreational boats, barges, and people's belongings floating in the river or on the banks that had overflowed. That was the summer that tropical storm Agnes struck the eastern United States from June 10 to June 20, creating at that time, what the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers called the worst natural disaster in U.S. history. Parts of Florida, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New York were declared disaster areas as rivers overflowed their banks, crippling transportation, destroying crops, buildings, bridges, and roads, isolating communities, forcing thousands to flee their homes, and killing 134. So I have experienced a flood, from a distance. Flood! Flood!

This morning we begin a new chapter in worship here at Akron FPC. Today we move to two services in an effort to reach out to the Akron community for Jesus Christ through two distinctly different worship experiences. In a way, we are seeking to flood the Akron area, not with water, but in a positive way with the grace, love and mercy of Jesus Christ.

This gives those who love the rich, liturgical style of traditional worship and those who love the free flowing, engaging style of modern worship to experience all that both services have to offer. It is also a way for us to reach out and to grow our church as we invite people to enjoy one or the other or even both styles. What we want to do through our worship experiences is flood Akron, flood the lives of those who come with the love of Christ.

Let me say something about the Old Testament passage from Malachi 3:9-11 and then a few things about the passage from John. I believe this passage from Malachi speaks to us today as a church as we seek to honor the past as well as welcome the present and future. It is a message about a challenge that God puts forth to His people. God's challenge was to "prove, or to try, or examine" God. The Hebrew root of "to prove" occurs 32 times in the Old Testament and is many times comparable to the words "to smelt, or refine," or another root meaning "to put to a test."

And yet, unlike these words, Malachi uses it almost entirely in a spiritual or religious sense. What God is saying is that if people will take up the challenge, God will open up "the windows" or "floodgates" of heaven and send an abundance of rain. As a matter of fact, the God of creation will send such an abundance of rain that there will be "an overflowing blessing" or literally, God will send rain "until [there is] a failure of sufficiency." And what we are praying, what we are asking God is that He would pour down on us, on this church an overflowing blessing, not for our benefit, not for our glory, but for His. And so we have taken up the challenge to move forward with opportunities and options for worship because we seek to see the Church that Christ established move forward because this is all about Him and the spreading of the Good News of the Gospel of Christ. So the first thing I want to say today is that **we have accepted the Challenge that God has put before us and be ready to move forward for Him.**

Which brings us to our passage from John- to set the stage for what Jesus has to say, our passage begins by saying, "On the last day of the festival, the great day,...." The time of the year is either September or October and it is around 6 months since Jesus fed the 5,000. It is the Jewish Festival of Booths or Tabernacles. I've been in Jerusalem at this time of the year and driving around Jerusalem you see people have constructed booths that look like tents to celebrate this festive occasion. It is the last day of the celebration and Jesus puts forth not a test as God did through the prophet Malachi to the people, but a wonderful, a remarkable invitation. You see, every morning during the feast you would find a procession to the fountain of Gihon. And the fountain of Gihon supplied the water for the pool of Siloam. And here, at the fountain, the priest would fill his golden pitcher with water and the choir would sing words these from Isaiah 12:3, "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation."

And then the crowd would make the journey to the temple and would carry in their right hands branches and twigs that would remind them of the huts they built in the wilderness, and in their left hand would be a lemon of citron, a sign of the harvest. And then they would make their way to the altar in the temple, waving their branches and singing this from Psalm 118:25, "Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!" And after that the priest would go to the altar, when it was time for the sacrifice, and he would pour water into a silver funnel through which it flowed to the ground. And on this, the 7th day, the people walked around the altar 7 times to celebrate the gift of water that God gave when Moses struck the rock in the wilderness at Meribah because the people had been crying out for water due to their unbelievable thirst, and almost in a time of desperation, Moses struck the rock with his staff and, it says in Numbers 20:11, "water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their livestock drank."

It was at this moment in the celebration that Jesus stood up and cried out to the congregation, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink."

There are two things I want to hold up for you today from this passage and they are two small, but powerful words; two words that are absolutely necessary, yes urgent - **Come** and **Drink**. You see the beauty of this timely offer from Jesus at this great feast to the congregation that has gathered at the temple altar is that the symbolism went fathoms deeper than the priest pouring out the water at the time of the sacrifice into that silver funnel through which it flowed to the ground. It was harkening back to the day that exasperated Moses, listening to the cries of the people who were parched, they were so thirsty they could taste their tongue, and he struck the rock with his staff and the water came flooding out, came pouring out as if the words of Malachi were echoing through the temple that God would

open up the windows of heaven and pour down for them an overflowing blessing.

Jesus looked at those gathered in the temple at the altar and saw in the faces of those inquisitive, spiritually hungry people as well as the probably now angry religious leaders and one mad priest that had been interrupted by this one called Jesus of Nazareth, he saw even greater, even more urgent needs than their ancestors who were wandering out there in the wilderness. Because the people that Jesus was speaking to were thirsty spiritual, they were in need of the things that are eternal, and the one who could minister to these needs was inviting them that day. Jesus was inviting them to come and drink for He was offering them the true water of life. And Jesus is the one who was turning the symbol that day into a reality.

There is not a one of us today who cannot say they are not aware of the restless, parched people all around us- those we go to school with, those we work with, those we live next to, those we are friends with.

Many of these very same people are looking for meaning and purpose in so many other places but they are coming up empty, unfulfilled, walking away still parched and maybe hopeless and disillusioned. And if Jesus were here today and saying this to us here, around this, what we call a communion table but others call an altar, He would be saying to us Come and Drink and tell others, those you know well and those you know a little, tell them about me and invite them to Come and Drink because He is the rock, and from Him eternal water flows to all who would come forward, for He will give them life. And, listen to this- just as Moses struck the rock in the wilderness so will Jesus be struck and broken open, through His death and resurrection, and life will burst forth and it is shared with all who come and drink. And, and "the one who believes," which is a phrase that is used 41 times in the Gospel of John, that person will become a rock out of whom will flow healing and life-giving water to others. That person, you, me, the people who come, and drink and believe will be so filled with the Spirit of God that there will be

this unbelievable overflowing, pouring down from the windows of heaven, as Malachi says, of shared life with others that it truly will be a flood from you, from me, to them. And this is the working, this is the gift of the Holy Spirit who releases the flood of water on to those who come and drink. If you have never drunk this water, come and drink freely, for it is waiting for you.

This is the challenge to us, this is the test. For such a time as this for us to be faithful to our calling to share the great and good news of Christ with a hurting world, with the Akron area and with the help of God, to ask Him to "open the windows of heaven... and pour down ... an overflowing blessing" all because we, here at Akron FPC, earnestly desire to let the flood begin. We you join me in this ministry, this endeavor for God? Amen.

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Introduction: Have any of you ever experienced a flood?

The summer of 1972, June 17-24th- tropical storm Agnes struck the eastern United States

This morning we begin a new chapter in worship at First Church

Malachi 3:9-11

God's challenge...

The Hebrew root of "to prove"

**We have to accept the _____ that God has put before us
and be ready to move forward for Him**

John 7:37-39

Setting the stage...

The Jewish Festival of Booths or Tabernacles where Jesus puts forth a remarkable invitation

Numbers 20:11- Moses struck the rock at Meribah

Two powerful words that are necessary, yes urgent- _____ & _____

The restless, parched people all around us...

Conclusion: This is the challenge to us, this is the test...