

Pastor Joe Polzin
John 7:37-39
“Rivers of Living Water”
Year A – The Day of Pentecost
May 31, 2020

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Every year near the beginning of October, the Feast of Booths, or the Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated [known today also as Sukkot, the Hebrew word for Booths/Tabernacles]. It was a harvest festival in Jerusalem, but it was also more than that. It was a chance for God’s people to remember and give thanks for His gracious provision during Israel’s wandering in the wilderness, when they dwelled in booths, in tents.

And when you read about this in the Old Testament, you know that one of the biggest concerns for Israel during this wandering was their need for water. How were they going to get the water they needed to survive in the extreme elements of this inhospitable wilderness? But it was God who time and time again faithfully provided his people with the life-giving water they needed.

And so, in commemoration of this, on the last day of this week-long Feast of Booths, the priest would lead the people down to the ancient pool of Siloam in Jerusalem, the spring-fed source of water that had kept the city well-provided for generations, even when they were under siege by foreign armies. The priest would dip a golden pitcher into the water. And the people would be waving branches of trees, and they would be shouting words from Isaiah chapter 12: “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation!” (12:3)

The priest would then lead the procession from the pool up to the Temple, and he would pour out the water as an offering to the Lord, remembering that God had not only historically provided water to his people in miraculous ways, but that he has also provided them with something much greater: the waters of eternal life and salvation.

And it was on this particular day, at the height of the celebration, that our Gospel Reading takes place. John writes, “On the last day of the [Feast of Booths], the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, “Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water”’” (7:37-38).

His words were no coincidence to the moment. Jesus unapologetically and boldly stands up at the moment when the people were worshiping the Lord who provided for all their physical and spiritual thirst, and Jesus proclaims that anyone who was truly thirsty should now come to *him* and drink, and he will provide rivers of living water to those who believe, that they would never go thirsty again.

Jesus was speaking to a people who knew what it meant to be thirsty, both in their physical thirst throughout their history, as well as their spiritual thirst for God’s salvation. And Jesus was now telling them that in order to satisfy that thirst, he alone was the answer. John goes on to tell us how the people reacted. Some said, “This really is the Prophet.” Others said, “This is the Christ.” But many were divided, and some even wanted to arrest him, and the Pharisees denounced him. Everyone was thirsty, but not everyone wanted the water that Jesus was giving.

What about us? What are you thirsty for? I think nowadays we all can agree that we are still thirsty people. We need and desire so much for our physical health as well as our spiritual health. And there are many things that can be said about living through trials in our lives, like the

one we all living through right now. But one thing is certain: trials and challenges not only reveal our thirst, what it is we desperately need both physically and spiritually, but it also reveals where we tend to go in an attempt to satisfy that thirst.

As a result of these current events that leave us feeling insecure and thirsty for some kind of comfort and assurance and security, where does your mind, your heart, and your trust go in order to satisfy that thirst? Well, for some they turn to their bank accounts. They obsess over work, and money, and finances, and their security is tied to a figure in a bank statement. But the problem with that is that money doesn't care about you, and it eventually will leave you.

For other people, they turn to the pleasures of this world, seeking comfort in whatever makes them feel good. Whether that's through romantic relationships, or alcohol or drugs, or by watching something on a computer or a TV screen or a smartphone. But even after all one might consume in this world, we find that the thirst still hasn't gone away.

Still for others, they turn to politics. This is something that obviously has gone on for a long time, but it seems to be reaching an even more amplified level during this crisis. And I don't care what side of the aisle you're on, the amount of shameful, prideful, and petty behavior from our politicians makes one enough to be disillusioned with it all. No wonder we are commanded to continually pray for our leaders.

And yet, people still go to this well of putting their trust in mankind. The amount of trust that we put into *this* person or *that* party in order to fix all of our problems, in order to make us feel secure, that if only *that* person were elected or allowed to do what they want, everything would be perfect. But it's a broken system because this is still an imperfect world, full of sinful humans. And yet, how many hours, how much energy do we sink into absorbing every ounce of political news and rhetoric from talk shows. Do we spend that much time seeking God's counsel from his Word as we do from the news?

And still for others, and I think this is the most insidious one, people know their great spiritual thirst for God and for his favor, and so they convince themselves that they are able to earn his approval, his blessings by what they do or what they don't do. This is like the Pharisees, who were so convinced that they could earn their righteousness in God's eyes, they ended up having no need for a Savior, no need for Jesus. Which is why they wanted to arrest him and lay hands on him in John chapter 7.

These are the things thirsty people turn to, money, or pleasures, or politics, or even our own good works, or any number of other things in this world. But the problem is that none of them can ever satisfy our thirst for what we truly need. And we are all in desperate need because each and every one of us is a sinner. And our sins have caused us to be devoid of life and health and well-being. Our sins have dried up our bones unto death. And we do not have what it takes to make ourselves alive again. We cannot satisfy our own thirst. We can work and work and work, but nothing we do will ever make us truly more safe, more secure, more comforted, more alive.

Instead, what we need is Jesus. And so we listen to his words today, from John chapter 7, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" There is only one who can satisfy our thirst, who can satisfy all our needs in both body and soul, and that's Jesus. And that's exactly what he does.

About six months after this Feast, Jesus went to Jerusalem for another feast, for the Feast of the Passover. And there he offered himself as the unblemished Lamb, as a sacrifice on the cross, as the atonement for all that made us so parched before God. And when he died, and his

side was pierced, out of his heart flowed a river of living water mingled with precious blood. The blood that paid the price for your sins, and the water that quenches the thirst you have on account of that sin.

And this river of living water flowed all the way from his cross and directly to the font, and it washed over you the day you were baptized. Jesus said out of your heart will flow a river of living water, and John says, he was talking about the Holy Spirit, whom those who believed in Jesus were going to receive, but only after he was glorified. And Jesus *was* glorified—on the cross, and at his resurrection, and as we heard last week, at his ascension, as he now sits at the right hand of God the Father.

And he promised to send the Holy Spirit, which he did at another feast, the Feast of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit was poured out on the Church. And the Holy Spirit ever since then has been poured out on believers at their Baptism, through those life-giving waters, so that you, as one who has been given faith by the Spirit to believe in Jesus, can be certain that your sins are washed away, so that you may know where the source of living water is, so that you can return to Jesus time and time again with joy to draw water from the wells of his salvation!

You see and hear people in this world turning to all kinds of different things, especially in this pandemic, in an attempt to satisfy their thirst. We may even be tempted to do so, as well. And so we continue to repent, and Jesus continues to forgive. That well never runs dry.

And Jesus also said when you believe in him, out of your heart will flow rivers of living water. The tide that has washed over you can't help but then flow out from your heart and into this world. The Day of Pentecost was the birth of the Christian Church, the beginning of the Gospel mission which would go out from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, so that all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. And God has placed you in your own end of the earth. It this tide that starts in your home, in your family, your neighborhood. You can help point a desperate and thirsty world to Christ, so that they too may share in this living water that he freely gives. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. **Amen.**