
Jesus said, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to Me, and let the one who believes in Me drink. As the scripture has said, “Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.” ’ Now He said this about the Spirit, whom believers in Him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified. John 7:37-39 (NRSV)

Have you ever hiked alongside a mountain stream? The water gurgles and sings as it rushes along. It leaps and dances around boulders and under fallen logs. Vibrant moss carpets the rocks along the banks. Fish linger in shady pools under the overhanging branches. Birds nest in the trees near the water. In the early evening, animals come down to drink. The water is cold and fresh, and even in the tranquil pools, it is always, always moving. How delightful it is to drink from a mountain spring. The water is often pure, clear, and cool. No wonder ‘water’ and ‘lakes’ are often used in real estate developments! From the book of Genesis, where the river flowed out from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:10) to the book of Revelation (Revelation 21:6), God uses springs as a way to show that He gives and sustains life.

Jesus entered the Temple one day. It was the last day of a major ‘church festival’ for the Jewish people. The three great ‘festivals’ (requiring pilgrimage) were Passover (reflecting on deliverance from Egypt, which matches Easter); Feast of Weeks or Pentecost (50 Days after Easter, a major harvest Festival, also celebrating the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai), and; Feast of Tabernacles (held in September or October).

Historically, Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles) commemorates the forty-year period during which the children of Israel were wandering in the desert, living in temporary shelters. During those years of wilderness wandering, the Lord God graciously provided for his people by giving them food and drink. God miraculously supplied them with bread from heaven and water from a rock. Do you recall that incident from the time of Moses? The Israelites were in the wilderness, thirsty, and they grumbled that there was no water for them to drink. So the Lord told Moses to strike a rock with his staff, and water would come out of it, and the people would drink. God was graciously providing for His people while they wandered in the wilderness. The Feast of Tabernacles, then, was a time when the Jews gathered in Jerusalem to commemorate that great provision.

Of special note for our text today is the water ritual that took place at the Feast of Tabernacles. On each of the first six days, the priest would march in procession to the Pool of Siloam, where he would fill a golden vessel with water. He would then march back to the temple, accompanied by the people reciting, “Therefore with joy you will draw water out of the wells of salvation”

(Isaiah 12:3). At the temple, the priest would process around the altar with the vessel of water to the accompaniment of a choir singing Hallel Psalms. He would pour out water as an offering to God, bringing to mind the water from the rock that sustained the ancient Israelites (Exodus 17:1-7; Numbers 20:1-13) as well as the rains that sustained Israel during the year just passed. The rite also constituted a prayer for God's continued provision of rain for the days to come.

Agriculturally, Sukkot is a harvest festival (celebrating the end of harvest). Thousands of people had assembled. And it was when the people had assembled, that Jesus shouted to the crowd. The people had seen the seven days previous, of living in 'booths' (tent-like constructions) and of water being ritually taken from the Pool of Siloam and poured on the Altar. And underneath the Temple itself flowed an underground stream. People symbolically 'saw' God's word as 'going out' giving life to the people, and life to the world. And Jesus make a 'connection' between these 'ritual practices' and a 'new life' to come. That 'life' was to come from Jesus though the power of the Holy Spirit. This 'Life' would have the 'power' to 'transform' people's lives. Jesus was speaking of the Holy Spirit who would work in a new and dynamic way.

Jesus made a strong declaration that will answer your need. Christians have long identified Jesus with the rock (I Corinthians 10:4) in the wilderness.

Jesus invites you to come to Him! Jesus said, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink." When Jesus invites us to come and drink, He uses figures of speech. What does Jesus mean by coming and drinking? He is inviting us to believe in Him and to receive what He offers! Jesus dies on the cross for our sins. He arose from the grave in power and victory. Now, He sits as the right hand of the Father. And it is through Him that we can have salvation. He can quench our spiritual thirst. And when Jesus says "Come" and "Drink", these verbs are in a present tense, which mean we can come to Him again and again, continually to receive a life-giving water that refreshes the soul.

What do you really thirst for? Do you long to know the meaning of your life? Are you longing for the kind of love that fills you up rather than drains you? Are you forever trying to find acceptance and respect? Or are those longings so deep and buried that you can't even say what you want or need? Perhaps you can't even get beyond just feeling... empty. Jesus can identify those deep longings and fill your thirsty soul.

Jesus also says he Spirit flows from "his" innermost being. Through the centuries, theologians have debated the meaning of verse 38. Do the rivers of living water flow from the innermost being of Christ, or the innermost being of the believer? Actually, we can take this verse either way. Both thoughts are true and both are in harmony with the rest of what John says in his gospel. One Bible Commentator says: "Whether we take this picture as referring to Christ or to the person who believes in Christ, it means that from Christ there

flows the strength and power and cleansing which alone give us life in the real sense of the term." Certainly, Christ is the giver of the living water. Just as clearly, the believer receives the living water. And the "rivers of living water" represent the abundance of the flow of the Spirit both to us and through us.

Today we celebrate (as the Jewish people celebrate Pentecost) the gift of the Holy Spirit: the Spirit spoken of in Isaiah 11:2-3: "And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of *wisdom* and *understanding*, the Spirit of *counsel* and *might*, the Spirit of *knowledge* and the *fear of the Lord*. And his *delight* shall be in the fear of the Lord." Here is described the 'Gifts' of the Holy Spirit: His 'gifts' that transform our minds in our 'inner being'. And these 'gifts' affect our 'character' and 'action'. The Apostle Paul, reflecting on the way the Spirit will 'alter' us says (Galatians 5:22-25): "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit." The Apostle Paul also says (2 Corinthians 5:17-18), "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ."

What the Bible is saying here is that in Jesus there is always the gift of 'new life'. And this isn't just words to satisfy our hearts in a few dark moments. This is the very power of God to bring about true and lasting 'change' to 'life'. But the question is: Why do we not always see and experience this? Why is there so much cruelty and suffering in the world? Indeed, why even do those who call themselves 'Christian' also behave in similar manner?

The reality is that people are people. We all have 'genetics'. We all have had situations in life that have truly 'shaped' our lives (and minds!). The Bible speaks of 'sin' at work in our 'mortal bodies' (Romans 6:12). There is this 'power' at work within us we are called to acknowledge and confess (this is speaking in 'spiritual terms'). And we speak that Jesus didn't come simply to edit our behaviour; He came to transform our lives. Jesus didn't come to make 'bad people good'; He came to make 'dead people alive'. Jesus wants to bring 'life' and 'salvation to us. And (Titus 3:5): "He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,

The Christian Church Festival of Pentecost is not simply a day where we remember something incredible that happened nearly 2,000 years ago (as we hear in Acts 2:1-21). Our 'Pentecost' is about God the Holy Spirit at work in our lives – right now! We do not have to live a 'powerless life'. The power of God is at work in us right now; through the very faith that the Holy Spirit gives us in Jesus. But what, really, is this 'power'?

Sometimes we may think that God is like the heavenly pill dispenser – who will give us the ‘magic cure’ to ‘take all our problems away’. But the Bible speaks of living in the shadow of the cross of Jesus. Jesus speaks of ‘taking up the cross and following Him’ (Matt.16:24, etc). ‘Taking up the cross’ is not about running away from our problems and our sins (flight response), but facing them. ‘Taking up the cross’ is not about vigorously denying our sins and faults (an ‘attack response), but being honest with self and facing them. And ‘taking up the cross’ is acknowledging that Jesus has taken up my brokenness; His grace overwhelms our soul. He is the ‘living water’. And God the Holy Spirit pours God’s grace and power into our lives

Jesus called, “Come.” He didn’t say it softly, so that only the people close to Him could hear it. He said it loudly so that all could hear it, and He is saying it to you too, “Come.”

The Apostle Paul says this (Romans 5:5): “Hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit whom He given us.” Jesus said, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to Me, and let the one who believes in Me drink. Now He said this about the Spirit, whom believers in Him were to receive.

The Holy Spirit is real, and He is at work in a ‘new’ and profound way. Whenever you pick up the Bible and spend time in prayer and reflection upon it, the Holy Spirit speaks. In the water of baptism, and the bread and wine of Holy Communion, the Holy Spirit brings us the ‘living water’: the ‘living water of what God has done for us in Jesus: His forgiveness, grace and love. Today we celebrate the ‘new life’ we have in Jesus. There is ‘life’ in Jesus. Salvation by Christ is of free grace, and justification is freely by His grace. We come to Him to ‘drink’ and ‘live’.

Today we celebrate our ‘Pentecost’. But ‘Pentecost’ for Christians is not a once-a-year event, but an everyday experience. When Jesus says “Come’ and ‘Drink’, He is speaking of a daily experience of living water. And this ‘water’ is the Spirit who refreshes our soul through faith in the incredibly holy, and loving, and forgiving God in Christ Jesus. This is ‘living water’ that never stops flowing from God. And it flows over you. Rejoice in that love, and live your life in the knowledge of God’s love and presence with you, now and always. Amen.