

## ***The Living Water of the Spirit***

Our second Scripture reading is John 7:37-44 (page 100 in the NT section of the pew Bible).

The Feast of Tabernacles/Booths was a 7-day celebration of God's provision for the nation of Israel, a time to give thanks and to pray for harvest rains. Also, it was a thanksgiving celebration of God's provision for the Israelites during the wilderness experience of 40 years prior to entering the Promised Land. It was an occasion of remembering how the Lord provided water from the rock in the wilderness (Exodus 17).

On each day of the feast, the priests would fill a golden pitcher with water taken from the Pool of Siloam, and then would carry in procession the golden pitcher around the altar with the high priest leading the way. With great pomp and fanfare, the priests would then pour the water into a silver bowl, to recall God's provision of water from the rock in the 40-year sojourn in the wilderness. This ceremony was performed all seven days of the feast. On the last day of the feast, this water processional was repeated seven times. And at the close of the seventh processional, a climax of excitement was reached when the high priest would lift his hands to signify the completion of the rites of this feast.

At this very moment Jesus stood poised to make a stunning announcement and invitation. Usually the posture for teaching and preaching was to be seated, but Jesus stood. And he "cried out," which would have been like a thunderclap from heaven.

### **John 7:37-39:**

*<sup>37</sup> On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, <sup>38</sup> 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.'" <sup>39</sup> Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*

Jesus boldly cried out an invitation to streams of Living Water, life through the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit there can be no real life and lasting satisfaction. And without the Holy Spirit, everything in the Apostles' Creed has no meaning. God the Holy Spirit is the creative, life-giving power of God in the very beginning of time; this Third Person of the Trinity conceived God the Son within the virgin, Mary; The Spirit is the power of God who raised Jesus from the dead, and is the One who creates Eternal Life in all who believe in Jesus. Today, as we affirm our belief in the Holy Spirit, we're asserting far more than an objective truth. We're affirming the presence and power of God in our lives.

We believe the Holy Spirit has become for us what Jesus in our text says he is—Living Water. Pastoral counselor Selwyn Hughes tells about an atheist

who once said to him, "I don't believe in God, but I would like to, if only to satisfy the desire that seems to be within me for transcendence." God has created us in such a way that he alone can satisfy the deepest yearnings of our hearts. No one's spiritual thirst can be quenched apart from the Holy Spirit, the Living Water.

In one of the last 10 Kilometer races, called a mini-marathon, in which I was a social participant (I was never a serious contender!), the front-runner was well on to his way to victory when he became dehydrated and disoriented. He was far ahead of the second place runner, when he turned onto the wrong bridge, about 300 meters from the finish line. Race officials had difficulty getting him back on course, and even so, he collapsed about ten yards from the finish line. A friend of his, who's also a serious runner, said his friend who became dehydrated has always had this tendency because he refuses to interrupt his running with drinking water. Many refuse to interrupt their living with pausing to drink the Living Water of a personal relationship of trust and faith in Jesus Christ, whose presence is essential for satisfaction, direction and life itself.

Jesus offered the woman at the well the life giving, soul-satisfying Living Water of a relationship with himself (Jn. 4). She had tried, as Jesus made all too clear to her, to find satisfaction in human relationships. She'd been married five times and was currently living with another man who wasn't her husband. She was desperately and futilely looking for someone or something that could give her satisfaction, could fill the void in her heart. But God alone can quench this thirst. Jesus told her, "*If you only knew* who asked you for a drink and he would have given you living water," (which he would give her).

Jesus described hell as a domain of everlasting thirst in his parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31). The rich man is in torment in hell. He begs Abraham to have pity on him and send Lazarus to dip his finger in water and cool his tongue, "because I am in agony in this fire," he cried. Hell is a realm of tormenting thirst because for those who have spurned the saving grace of Jesus, the source of Living Water. Jesus provided for our salvation through his horrendous suffering and death on the cross. While experiencing our hell for us, Jesus cried, "I am thirsty" (Jn. 19:28). Conversely, heaven is described as the realm where we'll never again thirst (Rev. 7:16).

Selwyn Hughes spent most of his 50 years of active ministry as a counselor, and toward the end of his career assessed the greatest need of the thousands he counseled over those 5 decades. He noted that, apart from illnesses with a physiological cause, most disorders were the result of spiritual thirst left unquenched. He noted how that even good church people, much like these religious leaders who dismissed Jesus' claims, tried to find satisfaction in the wrong places. Said Hughes, "We simply can't go through life thirsty. We have to get our thirst quenched—if not with God, then with something else." He added that any attempt to satisfy that thirst outside of a relationship with Jesus Christ will lead to problems. Many are trying to find their life satisfaction with job success, or even with their marriages, and other relationships, and are coming away dissatisfied and even disappointed, disillusioned, frustrated, depressed and even angry. Hughes talks about even a good man whose goal

was to become a minister, and he failed miserably. He became frustrated and even angry with God, whom he thought would be “proud” that he wanted to be his minister! Yet, God never gave him that goal. That’s why he was still thirsty. He needed to seek God himself to find lasting satisfaction.

Hughes notes that several years ago, when he was on the verge of retiring from active counseling, he began to think of a common denominator that had become evident in the lives of Christians who had sat in his office asking for spiritual help. It didn’t take him long to conclude that the thing that stood out above all others was a lack of spiritual passion. He noted that a number of these were ministers “who saw themselves more as performers than as desperately thirsty servants needing to drink daily from the spring of Living Water.” He writes, “The only satisfying relationship with God is a passionate one.” The only way to satisfy our deep thirst for God is through passionately pursuing God himself, and not by being religious and just good folks who learn the right talk and go through the motions of respectability.

It was not often that Jesus shouted, but here something moved his soul so deeply that he stood and shouted. He saw religious people and priests (today they could be pastors and church folks) depending on ritual rather than on a personal relationship with the living God who alone satisfies our deepest longings. He was moved to shout, “Come to me and drink!” He said, “Come to me,” and not come to your wife, or husband, or friend or therapist. And I can tell you of countless “miserable Christians,” what Sewyn Hughes says is “an oxymoron if ever there was one.”

Have you ever been cotton-mouthed thirsty and then come across, not lukewarm tap water, but cold, mountain spring water that was so fresh and exhilarating it literally took your breath away? John Eldridge says that if Christianity doesn’t take your breath away, then something else will. That’s why people look to substitutes that often are self-destructive behavior and often are marriage-destroying relationships. Jesus stood before the festive crowd, many of whom were oblivious to their thirst for God. Their religious observance would never satisfy. Jesus only could satisfy their thirst.

Jesus proclaimed a gift that had not yet been given (v. 39). The 11 had experienced a foretaste of this gift, but on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the church in fullness (Acts 2:1ff). And since that day, everyone who trusts Jesus is born again through the Holy Spirit. What was true for the first believers on the Day of Pentecost is true for us immediately. He, Jesus, gives us the supply of the Holy Spirit, who flows within us as a never-ending stream. The Holy Spirit is nothing less than the life of God in us. He’s the greatest blessing we can ever receive, for which we can ever pray (Lk. 11:13).

The believer receives the Holy Spirit, the life of God himself. Paul describes his presence as “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). He’s God in us to be our helper, our teacher, and our comforter. The Holy Spirit is God in us to begin, at the moment of our conversion, the life-long work of becoming more like Jesus as he produces in us the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).

Once you receive the supply of Living Water, you discover life with joy and purpose, but not complacency. In fact, the life of God in you, the source of Living Water, makes your heart thirst for more of him (Matt. 5:6). In arid places, water supplies may be depleted. But we never have to fear the depletion of God's supply in our lives. He's the source of grace that's enough to meet any and every need. We must every day come to him as our source and depend on him and draw grace and blessing from him, as we "keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit," who alone satisfies and empowers (Eph. 5:18).

The Jews at the feast acknowledged Israel's ongoing dependence on God to satisfy the nation's need for water, just as God gave water in the wilderness. But they failed to recognize that Jesus was the source of Living Water, and indeed they were spiritually dry and barren. These enemies of Jesus, who were carrying these golden jars of ceremonial water, had missed the point that the ceremony was pointing to Jesus as the source of Living Water. These enemies of his could tell you about Moses and the Israelites drinking the water in the wilderness, yet they couldn't believe Jesus was the source of Living Water.

To receive the unending flow of Living Water, we must come to Jesus as Lord, and accept his presence and gifts on his terms. We don't receive his life and blessing as an add-on to our lives. Christ becomes our life (Col. 3:4a), and the Spirit is the one who is to direct our lives. The Spirit-filled life is the Spirit-controlled life. I'm amazed at how, at this stage of my long Christian pilgrimage, I still fail to allow the Spirit to control my emotions and speech, and grieve, i.e. make sad, the Spirit (Eph. 4:30).

The streams flow within the believer but also flow out from us. We become a source of the Spirit's flow to touch the lives of others who are thirsty and in need of the Savior. This is what Jesus did for the woman at the well, and is what we are commanded to do—to share eternal life with those who are perishing.

A missionary family that served in Niger, West Africa, told a group of us visitors to their mission meeting about how they are sharing their water with a neighbor. Their mission house is bordered by a vacant lot, where a single woman lives in a grass hut on the other side of the wall that surrounds the missionaries' house. This woman is poor and has no access to water apart from carrying it in jars from a water source, which would be a long walk away. The missionary connected a water hose to his water tap, and threw the hose over the wall, and every day he turns on the water so this woman can receive a daily supply for her family.

As we introduce people to Jesus, they also will become to others the source of Living Water. That Source changes their lives and enables them to become life-changers. We don't just offer them the end of a hose. We offer them their own streams of Living Water that flow from within them.

Just this past week I received an urgent request from Wycliffe ministries, an organization that's involved in Scripture translation in remote areas of the world. They're declaring parts of the African continent an emergency zone, with masses of people dying of thirst, in desperate need for clean water to stave off diseases that are ravaging entire populations. Although this need is urgent, Wycliffe reminds us that the even greater need is for the water of the Spirit that comes through God's word and the good news that transforms lives and gives eternal hope.

The Jordan River is a precious and nearly depleted river that runs from Galilee southward, ending at the Dead Sea. That great Dead Sea cannot sustain life. Its waters are dead and not living because there is no flow out of the Dead Sea. It keeps its waters to itself. What a parable this is to the individual believer and to the entire church! We die if we don't live for God and for others. The source of Living Water must have an outward course for us to be alive to the Spirit.

The life lived in step with the Spirit and in the center of God's will is the most joyful and satisfying life possible. That's not to say it's a trouble-free life. To follow Jesus is to share in his sufferings. In fact, to drink of the Living Water is to become a stream of water in dry and barren places. It means to be available to God for taking his Living Water to the thirsty. Just as missionaries and aid workers are taking the Living Water to the thirsty in barren lands, we're to offer the Water of Life to the thirsty where God sends us. It's a life that allows for no indifference. Yet, it is the most satisfying and fulfilling life because it's the life for which you were created and redeemed.