

Sermon Draft

Text: John 7:37–39

Sermon: Pentecost 2020

One of the most agonizing experiences we can have is to see someone suffer, especially if it's a close loved one. It is absolutely heart-wrenching. We wish we could do something to help. More devastating, perhaps, is if someone we love is suffering because of his or her lifestyle or behaviors and won't admit it. While there's not much we can do, still our heart aches because we love the person.

One of the hardest things for any spouse or family to go through is when a family member is addicted to drugs or alcohol and refuses to admit that life is out of control. Mean, cruel things are often said to the very people who love the troubled child or spouse the most.

The values and faith that were once shared are discarded. The rejection of loving family members who want to help hurts deeply. Still, families most often don't give up. While the family members are committed to stop enabling behaviors, they communicate love and concern and the offer of help when the addict is ready to receive it.

They pray for the sufferer. They hold out hope for sobriety and recovery. We generally think of addicts as alcoholics and drug users but there are many things that one can be addicted to that can destroy lives. When an alcoholic or drug addict admits that his or her life is out of control, that he or she is spiritually thirsty and needs the help of God, amazing and miraculous things can happen. Again, this is with any addiction.

Despite a long history of rejection, God never stops having compassion on his creation. He redeems spiritually thirsty sinners and fills them with his Holy Spirit to help other spiritually thirsty sinners, testifying to God's mercy in Jesus, the living water (John 7:37–38).

How much more agonizing it was for Jesus as he attended the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths, which is the context of our Scripture text. The Feast of Tabernacles was an eight-day commemoration and celebration of God's merciful provision as the people of Israel were brought out of captivity in Egypt and entered the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land.

As the children of Israel and their livestock suffered from thirst, God commanded Moses to strike a rock in the middle of the desert, and water miraculously gushed out.

God wanted to teach the Israelites through this object lesson that he would always provide for his people and that they should not doubt him. God then commanded them to gather once a year in Jerusalem to commemorate his abundant provision for their thirst. As you can imagine, God used this feast as an opportunity to remind them that he would satisfy their spiritual thirst in the sending of the Messiah. For a thousand years, faithful Jews made the trip to Jerusalem not only for the celebration, but with the hopeful expectation that Messiah might finally reveal himself at the event.

Imagine the agony on Jesus' heart at this moment. For nearly three years, he has been preaching, calling people to repent because God's kingdom was at hand. He performed miracles as signs for people to see that he is, indeed, the promised Savior.

He openly stated that he is the fulfillment of Scripture's prophecy, that he was sent by the Father to redeem the world from sin. Yet most, especially the religious leaders, rejected him.

John notes in this same chapter of his Gospel that even Jesus' own brothers rejected him at this time. I can only imagine how much it hurt Jesus to be rejected by his own family. Nevertheless, from the compassionate heart of Jesus flowed living water.

Now, as Jesus is in the midst of temple celebrations with water pouring out around the altar, trumpets sounding, people singly loudly, Jesus stands up and cries out even louder, ***“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’”*** (vs 37–38).

Once again, Jesus demonstrates the love and compassion of God. God wants all of his creation to be saved; therefore, Jesus will not give up. He calls out to all who are spiritually thirsty to come to him. He boldly claims that he is the source of salvation. He is the true water of life.

John adds that Jesus said these things “*about the Spirit, whom those who believe in him were to receive*” (v 39a).

The day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2 was a fulfillment of Jesus’ word, because, as of this Feast of Booths, “*the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified*” (v 39b).

The Feast of Tabernacles in our text is just six to seven months before the next feast, the Feast of Passover. It was the last feast that Jesus would attend. By the end of Passover, Jesus was the sacrificial Lamb of God, to take away the sin of the world.

Here, Jesus would be glorified by the Father as he was crucified, bearing the sin, death, and spiritual thirst of all creation as our substitute under God’s righteous wrath and condemnation, so we could have spiritual life and our thirst quenched.

The One who is the source of living water suffered such thirst, was so dehydrated during the whole ordeal on our behalf that his tongue stuck to his jaw (Ps 22:15).

As the Fountain of Life died on the cross and a soldier pierced his abdomen, blood and water flowed out of his lifeless body to cover sin and give life to all who would believe that he is the Savior of the world. Jesus' atonement for sin was for all.

Jesus gives his Holy Spirit to all who drink from him, believe his Gospel, and receive him through the promises of his Word and Sacraments. One could say that each Sunday is a Feast of Tabernacles. Each Sunday is a Feast of Pentecost. We receive the Holy Spirit as we hear, in a language we can understand, the Good News of Jesus as the living water, who satisfies our spiritual thirst.

People throughout the world today are hearing the Gospel proclaimed in their own heart language, just as they did on the day of Pentecost. It is only through the Holy Spirit's saving work that anyone is able to recognize their spiritual thirst, come to Jesus, and receive his merciful forgiveness in the waters of Baptism, in the Words of Absolution, and in the very body and blood of Jesus that was shed for them on Calvary's cross.

The Holy Spirit is the one who keeps us in this faith in Jesus. The Law of God and life itself remind us of our spiritual thirst. The problem is that our sinful nature will always want to turn away from Jesus and deny our thirst or search for spiritual fulfillment from other places.

As your pastor, I say out to you as Jesus did in our text. Don't deny your brokenness and spiritual thirst. Don't pretend that everything is okay as you secretly try to hide your guilt and shame and pain.

Please don't try to fill emptiness in your soul with unhealthy relationships, consume your life and time working for things that eventually are destroyed, or mask your pain through drugs and alcohol. Rather, come! Hear the invitation of Jesus. Come to Jesus, the living water, and receive his mercy. Drink deeply. Drink often.

He will fill you, not with just a trickle or little stream of water, but with an overflowing river of his Holy Spirit.

Refreshed and renewed from Jesus' heart of living water, out of our redeemed heart flows the Holy Spirit like a raging river of mercy to go with God's benediction and be a blessing to our families, to our neighbors, to wherever we work and share the mercy that we have received freely. Helping our family. Helping our neighbor. Helping those with whom we work. Support efforts of mission and mercy. That's what the first Christians did.

And when we're asked, "You seem different. What's gotten into you?" we can speak to them about Jesus. We can invite them to drink of Jesus. We can invite them to join us, here, where Jesus quenches our spiritual thirst and enables us to be rivers of living water. Jesus will fill them with rivers of living water too.

Amen