

The Water Jesus Gives

11/3/24

Taylor Brown

John 7:37-39

Passing of the Peace

Anthem: *The Lord is My Shepherd* - Chancel Choir

The text this morning comes to us from John 7:37-39, and my Scripture references are coming from the English Standard Version.

Prayer for Illumination

Heavenly Father, I pray that your Spirit would fall heavily on us in this place. Open our eyes to see the vision you have for our individual lives, our church and for our city. I pray that your Spirit would reveal what we need to see from the Scripture text this morning.

Scripture Text:

³⁷ On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" ³⁹ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

The Word of the Lord - Thanks be to God.

Intro

Good morning! It is an absolute privilege to be preaching here this morning. Many of you have been walking with me and praying for me in the highs and lows of my challenging health journey. I join in with the hope Paul has when he says in Philippians *“I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.”* From the bottom of my heart, thank you for being such a loving and supportive community.

This morning I want us to think about together about “The Water Jesus Gives.” As we dive in, I want us to orient our time together around three main themes: “our thirst,” “the thirst around us,” and “Jesus’ thirst.”

Our Thirst

This morning I want to invite us to do a deep dive into our interior lives—the often overlooked landscape within each of us. Jesus often, if not always, leads us here. Jesus *cries out*, “if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.” This morning I want to ask us this question, church: are you in touch with your thirst? I believe that at the base level of the human experience is desire. We desire to be filled and fulfilled! We have a longing deep within us that feels like an ache. But longing for what? Many of us can’t articulate it exactly, but Jesus is proclaiming to know what we thirst for. How do we identify this thirst?

Christopher West, a theologian and author, names three categories for how humans deal with this longing and the underlying pain that accompanies the emptiness

we feel. He says we can take on the roles of the stoic, the addict, or the mystic. Let's spend time with each of these; the stoic, the addict, and the mystic.

While I think we all alternate between these personas, I believe that as religious folks, we tend to try to be stoics. We do not want to be dominated by desire so we may seek to suppress it. To grin and bear it. Rather than letting our guard down and owning our disappointment with life to one another or to God, we can tend to just push through, and sometimes in the process we end up numbing the sensitivity of our hearts and our hopes for fulfilled longing.

The second personification is that of the addict. I define addiction as any sort of unwanted repeated behavior. If you are like me and reach for sweets or social media when you feel down, then you can relate to this category. The addict lets their desire drive the ship which of course can lead to destructive cycles. The addict in us often gets shamed more than the stoic in us, but to the addict's credit, they realize we were created for more than our life currently offers.

And the third category is the mystic. The mystic recognizes that what humans need more than anything is connection to one another and to God. They recognize that, as Johann Hari—an addiction expert and New York Times best seller—points out, that “the opposite of addiction isn't sobriety, but connection.” They also realize that desire is not a bad thing as the stoic might suppose, but actually a good thing because we were made to be fulfilled. This approach means taking our thirst and longing to Jesus in prayer, and asking for the Holy Spirit to fill us with a sense of the Father's deep, compassionate and tender love for us. We take the pain of longing for deeper felt union

with God to God, and trust He will send His Spirit either in the moment or with time, as Jesus promises.

This connection is what I believe Jesus is inviting us into. Take Romans 8:14-17 for example:

¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

And so when Jesus says he will send his Spirit to those who thirst and believe in him, this is what I believe he means. We are made for a deep, abiding, loving relationship with our Father in heaven. The New Testament writers used the Aramaic term “Abba” to convey the absolute safety and security that a young child has with their “daddy” or “da da.” These love relationships are what cause us to live in the moment and savor it, something the addict and the stoic are not able to do.

Now I want to address different ways we may be thirsting in this room today. Maybe this idea of deep, foundation level longing is a new idea to you and you aren't yet able to see it in your life. Spend time noticing your interior landscape. I believe Jesus wants to meet you in that place. I encourage you to explore these ideas and ask God to reveal those layers to you.

Or maybe you are recognizing yourself in the stoic or the addict and the idea of the mystic sounds foreign, but desirable to you. You know you thirst but you don't know

how to thirst for God—to thirst for Him whom you were designed to thirst for. Here is what Jesus teaches:

¹¹ What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; ¹² or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:11-13)

Do you feel this desire for a new thirst? I encourage you to ask the Father in prayer for the Holy Spirit to reveal Jesus to you. I encourage you to really try out Jesus’ offer here—to drink of him and receive the Holy Spirit, maybe even for the first time. By “crying out,” Jesus is inviting *anyone* to repent and believe the gospel and consequently receive the Holy Spirit.

And there might be some of us here who have experienced this promise and yet still thirst for a deeper experience of union with God. I want to encourage you that the Bible assures us that this is a good thirst! This thirst is from the Holy Spirit. French Philosopher Simone Weil said “he who has not God in himself cannot feel His absence.” In other words, the felt sense of God’s absence implies God’s presence. John Calvin gave this pastoral counsel for those who thirst for God in his commentary on John 7: “(Jesus) does not say that, on the first day, believers are so fully satisfied with Christ, that ever afterwards they neither hunger nor thirst; but, on the contrary, the enjoyment of Christ kindles a new desire of him... we cannot possess a perfect fullness of the (graces of the Holy Spirit) in the present life. But believers, while they make progress in faith, continually aspire to fresh additions of the Spirit.”

Calvin, encourages us to “*aspire for fresh additions of the Spirit.*” He would probably point us to what classical Reformed theology calls the “means of grace,” by which we are filled and renewed in the Spirit. These include, baptism, prayer, reading God’s word, The Lord’s Supper (which we celebrate today), and gathering with other believers. These are ways to stoke the fire in our souls and they help us contain our thirst and experience joy as we wait for the full experience of union with God. C. S. Lewis referred to this incredible joy as “an unsatisfied desire which itself is more desirable than any other satisfaction.”

If you thirst for deeper intimacy with Abba this morning, keep seeking Him, this is a commendable and beautiful pursuit. In time He will reveal new layers of Himself to you. This is what you were made for.

I want to move on to the second theme, the thirst around us.

The Thirst Around Us

Perhaps we can look inward and notice, name, and feel that thirst for God within us. But it's important to take note of the fact that this thirst is all around us; in our city and beyond.

Jesus waited until the final day, *the great day*, of the feast of tabernacles, also called the feast of booths to make this emphatic invitation. It turns out this bears great significance. During this feast, water would be brought from the pool of Siloam to the temple each day. This ceremony would conclude with two large silver bowls, one filled with water and one filled with wine being poured before the Lord as the people would watch. This rite symbolized God’s provision of water in the wilderness for the Israelites

(the booths symbolizing their temporary dwellings in the wilderness). This rite also symbolized the Lord's pouring out of the Spirit in the last days. Some Jewish traditions equate this water pouring rite to Ezekiel's vision of blessing pouring out from the temple in the last days. Listen to these words from the prophet Ezekiel:

Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east...⁹ And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish...¹² And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.” (Ezekiel 47:1, 9, 12)

You might recognize this last line...: “Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.” Where else does the Bible have a passage like this? It's in the very last chapter of the very last book of the Bible. Revelation 22:1-2 says this:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

So we know this water flows for the healing and blessing of the nations, which in many ways is God's promise for Abraham's calling in Genesis and is fulfilled in Revelation. But here, in the feast of tabernacles, Jesus is saying that this reality is breaking in now. According to Jesus, He is the temple from which this water of healing

flows, and it can flow from us too, if we drink of him and believe in him. So, we wait for the fullness of God's kingdom in the future, but at the same time, Jesus is pointing out that the kingdom has begun, here and now, and by faith, we are invited to be sources of the life the Spirit gives.

Can you see the need for this life giving water of the Spirit around us? People are desperate for hope and life. Misplaced human thirst fuels the mega machine of consumerism that generates trillions of dollars annually. We have a big election this week that many people have put their hope in—but the outcome of the election will not be what quenches our thirst. No political candidate will bring the kingdom we are longing for. More than ever, people—including Christians—are falling into despair in the United States, and we, according to Jesus, are called to be the light of the world! Oh may the Spirit fall heavily on us in our church. May the flood waters pour out of our sanctuary and nourish Battle Creek and bring hope and life. This outpouring happens when we believe Jesus is the source of water and pray, church. We've already seen that Abba, our loving Father, will not withhold the Spirit from us if we ask—especially if we ask together. Pray that youth and young adults would be drawn to this place because it has something no other place can offer—encounters with Jesus through the community of faith. There is an exciting momentum happening here at First Pres, friends. I want to encourage us to lean in as we move towards being a community of deeper prayer and discipleship in the coming months and years.

What does the evidence of this water of blessing look like? You are looking at some evidence now! It is because of the dispensing of the Spirit in my life through your prayers that I stand here today. Friends, I have been in the valley of the shadow of

death, and Jesus is rescuing me by his Spirit and through your prayers. People come back to life physically and spiritually when we lovingly care for them in Jesus' name! Believe this this morning!

As Pastor Small often says, we're almost out of here—bear with me with one more heading: Jesus' Thirst.

Jesus' Thirst

Today we will take communion together. I want us to remember two things about what Jesus is doing when he institutes this sacrament. The first is bringing the New Covenant, and the second is making a vow. Let me read this episode in the upper room from Matthew 26:

²⁶ Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." ²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

When Jesus says "this is my blood of the covenant," he is referring to the New Covenant, which indicates the giving of the Spirit and the forgiveness of sins. Let me jump back into the Old Testament to share with you what Jeremiah says about this New Covenant:

³¹ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah... I will put my law within them, and I

will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jeremiah 31:31, 33b-34)

How do we get the law written on our hearts? By having a new life inhabiting us—the Holy Spirit! Ezekiel says explicitly that we will be given God's Spirit so that our hearts of stone will become hearts of flesh. This passage closes by pointing out that God will forgive our iniquity. Jesus in the last supper is showing us how this New Covenant will arrive—it will arrive by his blood. Every covenant in the Bible is sealed by blood, and God never insists that it be our blood, though He could. Instead He is bearing the cost of sealing this Covenant. He is covering the sin that pours out of us as we waste our thirst on shallow comforts, false god's, or religious pride.

So we know that we are forgiven for our tremendous sin. But how do we know we are also loved despite our sinfulness? Because Jesus thirsts for us. Did you catch the oath Jesus takes as he waits for us for the wedding feast at the end of this age? He says, *²⁹I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*" This is the language of *longing*. Jesus is containing his thirst as he anticipates a day of great joy, a celebration of being with you! Let this sink in. The book of Hebrews tells us "*for the joy that was set before him, Jesus endured the cross, scorning its shame.*" You are his joy! Why else would he pour himself out on the cross? On the cross, Jesus was pierced with a spear—and blood and water flowed out of him, so that living water would flow out of you.

How do we experience forgiveness and profound moments of joy and satisfaction in this life, church? Jesus does not say you must be good enough, he says you must be empty enough, empty enough to receive his water—you must believe in him. Today, believe in Jesus and receive His Spirit. This is the good news we proclaim—Jesus' kingdom is coming and nothing can stop the healing water that flows from him. Let us pray.

Prayer

Heavenly Father—we believe in Jesus. We believe he is your beloved Son who you sent for the forgiveness of sins, that you might redeem us for yourself. We pray humbly and earnestly now Abba, please send your Spirit to move powerfully among us at First Presbyterian Church. Please send your living waters to flood our streets with new spiritual life and vitality. Bring us the amazing joy of knowing your love and our secure attachment to you. We love Abba. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Please stand and sing the hymn of preparation, #498, "Loaves Were Broken, Words Were Spoken"

Hymn of Preparation #498 Loaves Were Broken, Words Were Spoken

Communion

Offering

Doxology

Offertory Prayer

Closing Hymn #182 I Heard The Voice of Jesus Say

Charge and Benediction

Maybe the Spirit opened something in you this morning that you want to explore. I encourage you to pursue where He is leading. Talk to someone you trust about these things. And pray for the flood waters of living water to flow from this sanctuary bringing life wherever it goes.

Lift your hands and receive this benediction:

2 Corinthians 13:14

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Have a wonderful day!

Postlude