

Lectionary Readings: Numbers 11:24-30; Psalm 25:1-15; Acts 2:1-21; John 7:37-39

Sermon Title: *The True Water of Life*

Prayer: *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of [our] heart[s] be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, [our] Rock and [our] Redeemer.*
(Psalm 19:14)

Salutation: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:2)

Text: The Word from God through which the Holy Spirit comes to stir our hearts for the Day of Pentecost is from our Gospel Reading: The Holy Gospel according to St. John the seventh chapter.

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ, one of the most agonizing experiences we can have is to see someone suffer, especially if it's a close loved one. It's 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.

I. How much more agonizing it was for Jesus as He attended the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths (Leviticus 23:33-44), which is the context of our Scripture text today. First of all, what is the Feast of Tabernacles? 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.

At the beginning of the time in the wilderness, the children of Israel and their livestock suffered from thirst. To satisfy their thirst, God commanded Moses to strike a rock in the middle of the desert. And water miraculously gushed out (Exodus 17:1-7). On this occasion, as God manifested Himself:

- 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. They made this trip not only for the celebration, but with the hopeful expectation that Messiah might finally reveal Himself at the event.

Yet, imagine the agony on Jesus' heart at this moment. For two and a half 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 (v 5). 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 individually 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'"* (vv 37-38).

Here, once again, Jesus demonstrates the love and compassion of God. You see, God wants all of His creation to be saved (Ezekiel 33:11; 1 Timothy 2:1-6). 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.

However, we must ask ourselves: *"How is our spiritual thirst quenched to receive Jesus, our source of salvation, as the true water of life?"* As we consider that question:

- John adds that Jesus said these things in regard to quenching our spiritual thirst: *"By this He meant the Spirit, Whom those who believed 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 come yet, because Jesus hadn't been glorified yet"* (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. It was at that time, Jesus would be glorified by the Father:

- As He was crucified.
- In His crucifixion, He bore the sin, death, and spiritual thirst of all creation as our substitute.

You see, our Lord was our substitute under God's righteous wrath and condemnation, so we could have spiritual life and our thirst quenched. Indeed, 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 (Psalm 22:15).

Therefore, as the Fountain of Life died on the cross, a soldier pierced His abdomen (John 19:33-35). And from His side blood and water flowed out of His lifeless body:

- To cover sin – your sin, my sin, and the world's sin.
- And give life to all who would believe that He is the Savior of the world.

For Jesus' atonement – His dying on the cross – for sin was for all. We call this Jesus' objective work of justification for our salvation.

II. Then, Jesus in His subjective work of justification, gives His Holy Spirit:

- To all who drink from Him.
- To all who believe His Gospel.
- And, to all who receive Him through the promises of His Word and Sacraments.

Therefore, in a manner of speaking one could say that:

- Each Sunday is a Feast of Tabernacles.
- Each Sunday is a Feast of Pentecost.

The wonder of all of this is that you receive the Holy Spirit as you hear, in a language you can understand. For it is the *Good News* of Jesus as the living water, Who satisfies your 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.

For its 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. This happens through the means of grace:

- 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 in, with, and under bread and wine.

Furthermore, 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 cry 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.

Therefore, refreshed and renewed from Jesus' heart of living water, out of your redeemed heart flows the Holy Spirit like a raging river of mercy to go with God's benediction and be a blessing to:

- Help your family.
- Help your neighbor.
- Help those with whom you work.
- Support efforts of mission and mercy.

That's what the first Christians did. And when you're asked, "*You seem different. What's gotten into you?*" you can speak to them about Jesus.

- You can invite them to drink of Jesus.
- You can invite them to join you, here.

For it is here where: JESUS QUENCHES OUR SPIRITUAL THIRST AND ENABLES US TO BE RIVERS OF LIVING WATER.

Conclusion: Dear friends in Christ, it is the Spirit Who enters the heart of a believer, and a believer calls others to learn of Jesus. This happened on that first Christian Pentecost, when the Spirit turned loose the streams of water from the disciples. And the water of Life has flowed through believers to countless thirsting souls in every age since.

In the name of ✠ Jesus, Who forgives all your sins. Amen.

To God alone the Glory!