

³⁷On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” ³⁹By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

RIVERS OF LIVING WATER

We are exactly two months away from the Grace Church campout at Mather campground in Grand Canyon National Park. The campground is one mile from the rim of the canyon. There are trails for every kind of hiker: nature trails, paved trails, mule-ride trails, even a shuttle-ride trail. Campground amenities include picnic tables, grills, fire pit, and little carefully, flushing toilets. There are also coin and card operated showers near the entrance to the campground. Showers cost \$2.50 for 5 minutes. Money well spent.

Since Jesus has fulfilled all the Old Testament ceremonial laws in our place, a camping trip like the Grace Church campout at Mather campground in the Grand Canyon is completely optional. You are NOT required to go. However, if we were living in Old Testament times, a week-long camping trip was required in the Feast of Tabernacles.

There were three Old Testament festivals: Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. Interestingly, we are celebrating Pentecost today, but our Gospel text is talking about Tabernacles. The Festival of Tabernacles commemorates the forty years the Israelites lived in tabernacles or tents after their exodus from Egypt. Every year for a week this festival of tabernacles would serve as a reminder for how the Lord always provides for his people.

Water was an important provision for God’s people wandering in the wilderness, but water was never included by Moses as a required ceremony for this festival. And yet the memory of Moses striking a rock with his staff and water rushing out of the rock, satisfying the thirsty bodies of the Israelites would certainly be memorable. Historians have written of a ceremony that was introduced to this festival where a priest would fill a golden pitcher with water at the Pool of Siloam and carried that pitcher of water over to the Temple through the Water Gate and poured it out by the altar.

Whether this ceremony was being referenced by Jesus in our Gospel text, we can’t be sure. Neither John nor other writers confirm this water ceremony as part of this festival. But Jesus, on the last day of this great festival, speaks about water. And the Apostle John ties Jesus’ speaking of water with the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This special outpouring of the Holy Spirit was seen and heard on the great day of Pentecost. And on the great day of Pentecost, the apostles and other disciples became like rivers of living water.

That’s not how they were on Easter morning or even on the day of the Lord’s ascension. On those days the Apostles were thirsty. On Easter Sunday, the apostles and disciples were thirsty to find out what had happened to Jesus. On Ascension, forty days after Easter, the apostles were thirsty to know if Jesus at this time was going to restore the kingdom of Israel as it was in the times of King David and King Solomon. On Pentecost, the Apostles were refreshed. On Pentecost Sunday, the apostles and other disciples were refreshed with an outpouring of wisdom they had never experienced before.

How about you? Are you spiritually refreshed or are you spiritually thirsty? A better question is where do you go when you are spiritually thirsty to find refreshment? On the Day of his Ascension, the Lord Jesus told the apostles to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And in our text, the Lord Jesus tell the apostles, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.” In our text Jesus extends this invitation in a loud voice. Jesus wants all people to hear this invitation. Jesus wants weary parents to hear this invitation. Parents who have been wearied by another school year and now perhaps wearied by the thought of summer. Even youths grow tired and weary, and if you thought all those years of school were wearisome, so is the task of figuring out what you are supposed to do with your life. This time of year can leave us spiritually thirsty in those ways, but the spiritual thirst that comes with the guilt of our sins and the grief we suffer in this life are year-round troubles.

Let's listen to the invitation again, but this time pay close attention to the destination. "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink." The destination is Jesus. The destination is personal success or political security. Those destinations are like broken wells and dried up river beds. Personal success and political security can't "quiet" a guilty conscience or conquer the enemy of death. And while fleshly pleasures and pain-numbing substances promise relief, those gifts from God become like germ-infested water outside the bond of marriage or the prescription of a respectable doctor.

Only Jesus, the glorified Jesus, the Jesus who journeyed to occupy the cross and the Jesus who journeyed to vacate the tomb, can conquer our fear of death and proclaim peace to our guilt-ridden hearts. And yet even these outstanding words and works of Jesus would come to nothing without the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Jesus needs to woo and win our hearts and draw us to himself. Jesus must overcome our unbelief and fight against our sinful nature every day. And Jesus does this work in cooperation with the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul was right when he said, "*No one can say, 'Jesus is lord,' except by the Holy Spirit.*" Martin Luther echoed this claim in his catechism, writing, "I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."

So come to Jesus. Jesus is your destination. And you will find Jesus in his Word and sacraments. You will always find Jesus in his Word and sacraments. So listen to what Jesus has to say to you. And do what Jesus tells you to do. Be baptized. Be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Commune. Take and eat. Take and drink. And don't harden your heart. Let the Holy Spirit work through the means in which he promises to work and be refreshed.

Every one of the apostles and other disciples were refreshed. Every one of them, who had a tongue of fire hovering over their head and an unlearned, foreign language falling from their lips were refreshed. Formerly, that had been parched souls. But now they had become like public fountains, with the Word of God so filling their hearts, their mouths overflowed like rivers of living water, declaring the wonders of God to all the people and in so doing refreshing the souls of thousands of people.

And this outpouring of the Holy Spirit still flows like a river of living water out of the mouths of God's people today. The rivers of living water flows when the believers in the world are unafraid to confess Christ to the unbelievers in the world. The rivers of living water flow when mature believers exercise patience with immature believers. The rivers of living water flow when believers who have been sinned against forgive those who have sinned against them. The rivers of living water flow in many directions: in an act of mercy, in a prayer, in a meal for the grieving, in a card filled with hope.

I don't know how close the Grace Church campers will get to the Colorado River. The Colorado River runs for about 1,500 miles and its water has brought great benefit to many people for a long time. And yet the Colorado River since about the year 2000 has been drying up. This loss of water is noticeable and for those living in the southwest this loss of water is a growing concern. As citizens of this great state, we too should be concerned. And yet we, who also have a dual citizenship in heaven and eagerly await a Savior from there, should be no less concerned about the faith level we have in our hearts and how this faith level overflows to others with Christ-like words and actions. So what is the faith-level in our congregation? What is the faith-level in your heart? Are you refreshed? Are you refreshing? Our Pentecostal prayer today is that the Word of God would so refresh us today, and so fill us with comfort and peace and hope that can only come from Jesus, the glorified Jesus, and the ascended Jesus who now shares his saving work with the ministry of the Holy Spirit, so that not only would we be refreshed by the good news of the gospel, but so that by our words supported by our actions of faith will bring refreshment to many others who are thirsting for Jesus. Amen.