

Pentecost Sunday / May 28, 2023

John 7:37-38

“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water’.”

Rivers of Living Water

Water is essential to life. Dehydration can cause numerous health issues, affect our thinking, perception of reality and ultimately cause death. Without water there is no life. It is not surprising that throughout scripture thirst and hunger are metaphors for our most basic spiritual needs, while God is identified as the source by which those needs are met. We need water to refresh our bodies. We need a spiritual water to refresh our souls. Water is essential for life and well being in our bodies. Our spiritual needs can only be met with the water God provides our souls through Jesus. In our gospel Jesus said, “If anyone thirsts, let Him come to me and drink.” Earlier in conversation with a woman at a well, Jesus said, everyone who drinks well water will become thirsty again, but “Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” Jesus refreshes our whole spirit; soul and body, in time and eternity.

The spiritual water we need is God’s righteousness. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” The water Jesus gives to slake our spiritual thirst is His righteousness in forgiveness, by which we receive healing in relationship with the heavenly Father, who is the source of our lives in body and spirit. We can’t ignore physical thirst. But it’s easy to overlook our spiritual thirst. We can be spiritually dehydrated and not even feel it. It’s a blessing to feel our spiritual thirst. It shows we need Jesus. Our thirst for water is a constant reminder of our need for the refreshment God gives through Jesus in the word, the water of baptism and the bread and wine of Holy Communion. Whoever drinks of the water He gives will never be thirsty forever. The water He gives wells up within us to a spring of eternal life and flows through us to give refreshment to others through our witness to Him as God and Saviour.

Our gospel takes place on the last Pentecost of the Old Covenant. There are two kinds of Pentecost in our readings. Pentecost of the Old Covenant and Pentecost of the Covenant made new in the blood of Jesus. Pentecost was a feast of the covenant God made with Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai. It occurred fifty days after Passover. It was the culmination of the Feast of booths, which remembered Israel’s encampment at Mount Sinai after Passover, the Exodus and the sealing of the covenant. Pentecost was the great day of the feast, commemorating the giving of the law through Moses. The Law was central to Israel’s celebration of Pentecost. Israel was to make the Lord known as God and Saviour of all peoples, by observing the law.

Christian Pentecost is a feast of the covenant God made with Israel and all people, through Jesus and the blood He shed on Mount Calvary. Christian Pentecost commemorates the grace of forgiveness Jesus earned through His sinless life and sacrificial death. It celebrates the salvation God offers all people to receive through faith in Jesus. It proclaims the mercy of God, who gives forgiveness freely and abundantly to all who believe in Christ as Saviour and receive baptism into His death and resurrection. Old Testament Pentecost celebrated the law God gave through Moses. Christian Pentecost celebrates the gospel of forgiveness, which God gives as a river of life to everyone who calls on Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

On the great day of the feast, the fiftieth day, Jesus stood up and offered Himself as living water to satisfy our spiritual thirst for God’s righteousness, saying, “If anyone thirsts let him come to me and drink.” Our lesson from Acts describes the first Christian Pentecost. The Spirit anoints the church for ministry, even as He anointed Jesus when He began His ministry. God ratifies the covenant Jesus made with Him and humanity through the shedding of His blood on the cross. The Spirit fills the believer’s hearts, opens their mouths and empowers the Church to proclaim the salvation God has prepared for all people in Christ Jesus. Christian Pentecost celebrates Jesus’ fulfillment of the law in our place and the grace of forgiveness we receive through faith in Him as God and Saviour. Christian Pentecost is the beginning of the Church’s proclamation of the gospel, the good news that everyone who calls on the Lord Jesus will be saved.

At Pentecost the disciples were clothed with power from on high. The Holy Spirit was poured out upon the Church. In the languages of every nation in the Roman world, believers proclaimed the wonders of God’s love and His promise of salvation for all who receive Christ in their hearts and believe in His name. The law came through Moses, grace and forgiveness come through Jesus Christ. We celebrate the gospel of God’s love in Christ

Jesus, through which the Spirit refreshes our souls in forgiveness and life. We remember the mission of the church is to share the water of life in Christ with others. Jesus said “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” We consider how we may bring refreshment to the lives of others by sharing Christ and the good news that everyone who calls on Him will be saved in time and refreshed in eternity.

Water as a metaphor runs throughout scripture. God provided water for Israel in the wilderness from a rock. Ezekiel’s prophecy of Israel renewed and restored to the Promised Land, concludes with a river flowing from the new temple, refreshing the desert and making salt water fresh. In Revelation, the Lamb leads the souls of the faithful who have passed out of tribulation, to springs of living water and they shall hunger and thirst no more. Later in Revelation, Ezekiel’s vision is fulfilled, as living water flows from the throne of God to water the New Jerusalem, where God’s people dwell with Him forever in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In our gospel Jesus offers Himself as refreshment for all who thirst. The water Jesus gives wells up to a spring of eternal life within all who receive.

The water of life flows into the hearts of others through the words and witness of those who believe. Christian Pentecost is the beginning of the church’s ministry of making disciples of all nations, proclaiming the gospel of grace in Christ Jesus, baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost is the giving of the Holy Spirit to empower the Church to proclaim salvation through faith in Jesus’ Name. The Holy Spirit is given both so that we would receive the water of life by believing in Christ and so that believers would share the water of life, by proclaiming the good news of Jesus and salvation in His name to others. Living water flows into our hearts through faith in Christ inspired by the Holy Spirit. Living water flows out of our hearts as we share the gospel with others. Through our sharing, the Holy Spirit creates and nourishes faith in their hearts as well.

The image of water flows through the scriptures like a mighty river. Isaiah sings “with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.” Jesus is the wellspring of salvation. Whoever drinks the water He gives will never thirst in time and eternity. Jesus calls out, “To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.” Jesus is the spring of the water of life. He gives without payment, because He has paid the cost through the blood He shed on the cross for human sin. He offers the living water He purchased at a cost, freely for all to receive through faith in Him.

Jesus offers the water of life through the ministry of the Church, anointed and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Revelation concludes with the Spirit and the Church calling out, “Let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.” Believers are blessed both to receive the refreshing waters of life through faith in Christ, and to offer refreshment to others, by proclaiming the gospel of salvation and forgiveness, the good news that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

God bless us with His Holy Spirit, so we may both believe in Christ as our God and Saviour and share His salvation with others, proclaiming His name with our words, with our prayers and by the kindness of our hearts. In Jesus’ Name. Amen