

“Living Water From Where?” John 7:37-52

Water. H₂O. It is absolutely necessary to sustain human life. We take it for granted, but drinking water is such a vital need that people in many places walk hours each day just to get enough of it to supply their families, and villages and towns have often been built around sources of water. Two years ago, you helped the town of Ciudad Hidalgo in southern Mexico to dig a well and install a purification system for their water, which was life-changing for many there. Thank you! And in desert-like climates, such as first-century Israel, water was even more precious. So, Jesus' words about water in this morning's passage would have grabbed their attention.

³⁷On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, ³⁸and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” ³⁹Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7:37-39)

There's a lot packed into these few verses, so we'll spend most of our time this morning looking more deeply at them. Jesus spoke these words on the last day of the Festival of Booths. It was the most popular of the three major Jewish festivals. Families would erect booths or tent-like huts

made from palm and tree branches and would sleep in them for the seven days of the festival! The festival commemorated a time when God's people slept in temporary shelters as they journeyed through the wilderness for forty years following their liberation from Egyptian slavery.

The festival also had a water theme, remembering how God provided water for the people in the desert through that whole journey. So, each day an elaborate ritual was enacted in the temple at Jerusalem involving water. The priest, accompanied by a procession, would go down to the pool of Siloam and fill a golden pitcher with water. Accompanied by throngs of people singing songs of thanksgiving, he would return to the altar and pour out the water on it, as everyone thanked God for water and asked him to bring rain during the dry season in which the festival was held. On the 7th day, this ritual was repeated seven times.

Jesus may well have invited people to come to him for living water as those seven processions were taking place! At any rate, water would certainly been on the mind of all those who attended the festival. Echoing what he said to the woman at the well back in chapter 4, Jesus invites anyone who thirsts to come to him for living water. I like it that there are no barriers regarding who may come to him. Slave and free, male and female, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile- all are invited to come and have their spiritual thirst quenched.

And we all have spiritual thirsts! Thirsts for security, for meaning, for significance, for forgiveness, for love, and for strength when we get worn down trying to do the right thing. And most of us have already discovered that you cannot meet these spiritual needs with material things. Spiritual needs require spiritual solutions, which Jesus is offering to provide.

In The Silver Chair, the 6th book of C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* series, a young girl named Jill finds herself in a strange, magical land far from her home in England. After walking for a while there, she discovers that she is very thirsty. She is excited to come upon a stream, but there is a lion next to the stream, who unbeknown to her is Aslan, a Christ figure, the Creator of Narnia. Let's pick up the story here.

"If I run away, it'll be after me in a moment," thought Jill. "And if I go on, I shall run straight into its mouth." Anyway, she couldn't have moved if she had tried, and she couldn't take her eyes off it. How long this lasted, she could not be sure; it seemed like hours. And the thirst became so bad that she almost felt she would not mind being eaten by the Lion if only she could be sure of getting a mouthful of water first. . . .

"Are you not thirsty?" said the Lion.

"I'm dying of thirst," said Jill.

"Then drink," said the Lion.

"May I- could you- would you mind going away while I do?" said Jill.

The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. And as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience. The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic.

"Will you promise not to do anything to me, if I do come?" said Jill.

"I make no promise," said the Lion.

Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer.

"Do you eat girls?" she said.

"I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms," said the Lion. It didn't say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

"I daren't come and drink," said Jill.

"Then you will die of thirst," said the Lion.

"Oh dear!" said Jill, coming another step nearer. "I suppose I must go and look for another stream then."

"There is no other stream," said the Lion. It never occurred to Jill to disbelieve the Lion- no one who had seen his stern face could do that- and her mind suddenly made itself up.

It was the worst thing she had ever had to do, but she went straight to the stream, knelt down, and began scooping up water in her hand. It was the coldest, most refreshing water she had ever tasted. You didn't need to drink much of it, for it quenched your thirst at once."

I encourage you to read the book yourself to find out what happened next! But this scene is clearly based on Jesus' promise of living water. It is available to anyone (like Jill) who will come and trust that Jesus can provide for their spiritual needs. But there is a surprising wrinkle here in verse 38. Did you notice it? Jesus said, '*Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.*' Initially, the refreshing waters come from Jesus. But now they are flowing out of the believer him or herself! What's that about?

Almost 500 years ago Martin Luther reflected on this verse and wrote this, paraphrasing Jesus, "The person who comes to me I shall equip, not only to be refreshed and satisfied and to quench his own thirst but also to become a sturdy, earthen vessel, endowed with the Holy Spirit and with gifts that enable him to give consolation and strength to many other people..." We are blessed with living water so that we can bless others with that same water. Do you know what happens to a body of water, when water comes into it, but has no way out? It stagnates! God has

designed us so that we need to pass the blessing of Jesus on to others or we stagnate! We need to pay it forward.

And, as Luther notes, this water symbolizes the presence of the Holy Spirit, who indwells all who follow Jesus. Jesus will say more about the Spirit later in John's gospel, but for now we'll just note that if you are a follower of Jesus, the Spirit of Jesus lives in you, satisfying your spiritual longings, and equipping and empowering you to do God's work in the world. This is wonderful news, but like today, not everyone who heard this good news from Jesus was glad for it.

⁴⁰When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, "This is really the prophet." ⁴¹Others said, "This is the Messiah." But some asked, "Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he? ⁴²Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?" ⁴³So there was a division in the crowd because of him. ⁴⁴Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.
(John 7:40-44)

This is just a continuation of what we saw last week- divisions among the people over Jesus' identity and message. Many of John's readers, including us, can sense the irony in the ignorance of those in the crowd who insisted Jesus could not be the Messiah because he wasn't from Bethlehem. They knew that he grew up in Nazareth in Galilee, but we

know that he was born in Bethlehem, fulfilling the prophecy! Their own skeptical words actually strengthen Jesus' claim to be the Messiah.

The chapter concludes.

⁴⁵Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why did you not arrest him?" ⁴⁶The police answered, "Never has anyone spoken like this!" ⁴⁷Then the Pharisees replied, "Surely you have not been deceived too, have you? ⁴⁸Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? ⁴⁹But this crowd, which does not know the law—they are accursed." ⁵⁰Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, ⁵¹"Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?" ⁵²They replied, "Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee." (John 7:45-52)

There are a couple emerging advocates for Jesus here. First, the temple police, of all people, give a simple witness! They had been sent to arrest Jesus, but were so impressed by his teaching that they couldn't do it! The religious leaders who sent them have nothing but contempt for the police and for the crowds of ordinary people who they believe have been deceived by Jesus. They argue that none of the religious authorities (the people who should know) has believed in Jesus. Well, maybe there is one...

Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of their high council, the same Nicodemus who came to Jesus under cover of darkness in chapter 3, insists that the Pharisees follow their own rules and give Jesus a fair hearing. He doesn't acknowledge his own belief in Jesus, which may still be emerging, but he does stand up for Jesus' rights.

OK. Two take-aways I see from this passage are this. First, come to Jesus and he will fulfil your deepest thirsts and longings. It doesn't matter where you're from or what you've done; Jesus' invitation to you stands. Read his stories and teaching in the gospels. Pray and ask God to meet you where you are. Talk with others who have experienced Jesus' presence in their lives. Come to Jesus. Second, be a conduit of God's love and grace to others. Allow the Spirit to lead you into situations, maybe even uncomfortable situations, where the love and grace of God is needed. Don't let your faith stagnate by making it just about you and Jesus. You have been blessed so that you may be a blessing to others.

One way people at GPC have been a blessing to others is through our mission trips. This year we have had an adult trip and a youth trip to South Carolina, where our groups built and improved houses for people in need. Tomorrow a group leaves for Mexico, where we'll do our best to be a stream of living water to the people who live there. And, if past trips are

any indication, fellow believers there will be a stream of living water to us!

How will you be a blessing to others this week?