



# “Quenching Your Thirst”

Text: John 7:37-39

*a sermon by Kevin Fleming*

**Pentecost Sunday, June 4, 2017**

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - EVANSVILLE, INDIANA

We’re coming to the end of the holidays and festivals that have marked the spring. We began way back at Ash Wednesday, then moved through the days of Lent, marked the events surrounding Jesus’ final evening with his disciples and his crucifixion and burial, then sang our “alleluias” on Easter morning, and now, fifty days after Easter, we mark the Day of Pentecost – the birthday of the church – when the gift of the Holy Spirit was given to those early believers and joined them together to be the Church. Pentecost is not one of those days that has been universally embraced by the Church. No matter how you try to dress it up – with balloons and birthday cakes and miles of red bunting enveloping the church – we just haven’t bought into Pentecost like we’ve bought into Christmas Eve and Easter morning.

Part of that is because we a little leery of the Holy Spirit. We’ve all seen the television broadcasts and movie depictions of what happens when the Holy Spirit shows up. People start acting like lunatics, screaming and jumping and shaking uncontrollably. We’re Presbyterians and we aren’t going anywhere near that.

Truth be told, those depictions – often given a little added “umph” by unscrupulous evangelists and misinformed screenwriters – are not accurate. God is not a God who makes his children look like imbeciles. Nor does God overpower us and overwhelm us, making us behave in ways that make us feel uncomfortable or embarrassed. Our joy and excitement (even among Presbyterians) can be misunderstood and misinterpreted by the world around us – as the actions of the disciples on that first Pentecost were attributed to inebriation.

As simply as I know how to put it, the Holy Spirit is the presence of God in the world today, drawing people away from the false gods of our age and drawing them to an authentic connection with God and other human beings. The Spirit gives us the ability to follow in the way of Jesus and to see with new and clearer eyes the way of God in a world that seems, in more recent days, to have lost that way in a spectacular manner.

In our passage from John's gospel, Jesus says, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and 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.'"

All of us have had the experience of being thirsty. As the days warm, we are moving to the cold drinks of summer in an attempt to find some comfort. When I was out in Denver, the presence of refillable water bottles, reminded me that I was in a place – one mile above sea level – where the business of staying hydrated is taken with utmost seriousness. We all know the relief of that cold liquid on a parched throat. We all know the restorative power of a glass of water.

But, Jesus is not talking about physical thirst and physical relief.

Look around our nation today. We are in an epidemic of thirst. There is a desert quality to our nation these days – a deep sense of parchedness.

There is a deep sense of thirst that is caused by fear. Fear has become the reason we do everything. We're afraid if we do something. We're afraid if we don't do something. We are told to be afraid of some people. We wonder if we shouldn't be more afraid of others. Some say we need to hide behind walls, like the cowering disciples of old. Others say we aren't afraid enough.

There is a deep sense of thirst that is caused by change. The old ways are fading away and the new ways are not quite visible enough for us to understand and accept. The passing away of old ways may mean major upheavals in the way some live their lives and earn their living. Some new ways will mean seeing with new eyes and hearing with new ears. The passing of some old ways will cause anger and resentment. Some of the new ways will challenge us to be bold and courageous.

There is a deep sense of thirst that is caused by anger. Malicious words and malevolent actions are the order of the day. Name-calling and hateful actions are considered acceptable and even proper. It has become acceptable to slander people and malign and impugn the integrity of others. Bullying and harassment have been redefined, even as our children are being broken by the practice, and some – as young as elementary students – take their lives, rather than live with the pain.

Our nation and our world are parched places. People are thirsty for something that will give life a new focus, a genuine authenticity, and sense of righteousness and hope. People are living in a desert of discontent and they are losing hope that things can be better.

Jesus said, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and 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.’ ” Now 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.”

You see, my friends, this is why Pentecost is so very important. The Holy Spirit is God-with-us, leading us away from the lies and falsehoods of our age, into the truth of God’s way. The Holy Spirit opens doors and windows of new possibilities. The wind of the Spirit blows into the dusty places of our lives, blowing away the rubble of the false life and blowing in the fresh air of God’s love and compassion. The fire of the Spirit burns away what is false and fictitious and kindles the fire of faith, hope, and love in the lives of those who welcome the Spirit’s presence.

And for the writer of the Gospel of John, the Spirit is like water, flowing from the deepest part of God’s being into our lives, and then flowing from deep within us into all the world. Like the Samaritan Woman at the well, Jesus tells us that streams of living water are evidence of the Spirit’s presence to satisfy the deepest thirsts of human life.

Like the waters of irrigation, the Spirit can water the barren and arid wasteland and cause it to be a place of verdant and fertile life. Like the waters of the womb, the Spirit surrounds us and supports us as we grow in grace and in the knowledge of God. Like the rain that falls on the desert, the Spirit can bring forth new life from deep within the soil and the desert can bloom.

I know this would never happen to any of you, but I bought some flowers and plants with the full intention of putting them in pots and in the ground. But, something happened and the plants sat for a day, in the sun, and the next day, when I went to plant them, they were limp and lifeless.

Being a frugal person – some might call it “cheap” – I decided to plant them anyway. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. I put them in the ground and in their pots and gave them a good drink of water.

The next day I went to have a look. The plants were standing up – resurrected from the dead! – and they seemed as happy as plants can be to be alive. All they needed was a little water.

Do I need to finish the sermon for you?

I can stand here today, without fear of contradiction, and say to you that we need Pentecost. We need the Holy Spirit to move in our world, in our nation, and in our lives. We need the guidance and direction the Spirit offers to guide us back into the way of God, made known in Jesus Christ. We need the living water to flood our world and our lives and bring us back to true and authentic life – the life God intended for us.

May the Spirit engulf and inundate our lives and may we be viaducts of the Spirit, channeling the living water of God’s presence and love into the parched places of our world. For now and evermore. Amen.



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