

Come and Drink

Grace, Mercy and Peace to you from God our Father, and the Lord, Christ Jesus. Amen.

The text for our message today is the Gospel read earlier, which reads once again: “On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.’ By this he meant the Spirit whom those who believed in him were later to receive.” This is the text.

Dear friends in Christ,

It was the last and greatest day of the feast when Jesus stood up to speak. For seven days the people had been preparing for this moment. From all over the world they had come for the Feast of Tabernacles, or Pentecost, which was a combination Thanksgiving celebration and camping trip. Pious Jews poured into Jerusalem, from the courtyards surrounding God’s holy temple, on down through the streets of Jerusalem, packed shoulder to shoulder, carrying thanksgiving gifts to fill the treasury of the temple once again, after a successful harvest, so that the poor could be helped another year and the temple maintained, and to worship God for his goodness. They carried woven palm stalks and citrus fruit as signs of God’s blessings, and they thanked him for the water with which he had blessed their land and their harvest.

There was no need to book reservations ahead of time at an inn for this festival. Everyone was to stay the week camping out in little huts they would build of branches from the countryside. It was a time for three things thereby. As they lay in their little huts, they could thank God for the blessings he had given their country as a whole after 40 years of wondering in the desert. Sometimes you don’t realize how thankful you are for something until you have to go without it for a week. And it was a time to realistically think about few earthly things you really absolutely need to get by, so that you could purify your heart’s desire, and be more thankful. Back home you might think you really needed that new oil lamp and how could you live without it, but out in the hut, you realized you really didn’t need it, after all. And third, like the pilgrims of ages before in the desert, this festival gave you time to think of where your life was going. You were away from it all, and you could think, “Are my goals in life good ones? Is my current direction going to take me where God would want a Lord-centered life to be?” Because when I get back to sleeping in my own bed, maybe I could alter my course a bit.

And every day at the festival reminders surrounded the worshippers of God’s role in their life. The blessings of heaven were theirs. Salvation and forgiveness concretely portrayed in the sacrifices of the temple. And the water of life.

On the last day of the feast the priest went down to the pool of Siloam, the water reservoir at the foot of Jerusalem’s holy hill, and with a golden pitcher dipped water from the spring to carry back up to the temple mount of Zion. Throngs of people roared about him. The entire procession took no less than 446 clergy and an equal number of Levites

and thousands of worshippers, as the priest took that pitcher up to the temple and with great ceremony poured it out only the rock where Abraham had nearly sacrificed Isaac. And the people knew the symbolism. The outpouring was God's blessings upon us. And the outpouring was God's spirit given to us, leading us to what our spirit needs. And the outpouring was some day the Anointed One or Messiah, whom God would send. God's Word had said, "A spring of life-giving water will stream out from the house of the Lord!"

At this point the people paused for a prayerful hush and a chanting of Hallel, or praise. Then Jesus broke that silence with a voice so loud it could be heard through the crowd of the temple, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." Here Jesus fulfilled the festival which had gone on for 1500 years. Whatever your life is thirsty for, Jesus is the answer. Wherever you seek the blessing of God, you'll find it only in him. If you wonder what plan God has for you, or where your life should be headed, or what you truly need in your pilgrimage, He wants to fill you with His spirit. And if you seek forgiveness, He is the Messiah. True God, he came to this world in order to enter your life, by giving he own for your sins, and paying that penalty, so that you could by faith have eternal salvation, and a life that follows the Lord.

Jesus said, "If you're thirsty, come to me." I give you free grace so that you can be certain of eternal life. But that's not the end of it. Now I call you to follow me. You need to be where Christ is, every day in prayer and in the Word. He is the one you're a disciple of, and that means your life becomes like him. You study and watch him, so that what you see in Christ's life you do in yours. "Follow me," Christ Jesus says, and we'll have an adventure. Everything else in life is just wandering around in the wilderness, until you learn I gave you life, and the Holy Spirit, so that you could walk my way. The purpose of your life is to bring glory to God, learn to love and trust him, and to find joy in living in grace.

And you'll have streams of living water flowing out from within you if you seriously intend to be where Christ is in your life. This is an odd description isn't it? What are those streams? Living water is water that doesn't just sit there. It flows like a spring, intent on getting someplace else. Sometimes you'll find a spring that gives birth to a stream. Eventually that stream joins with others to become a river, as many sources flow into it. Jesus describes here something that's the opposite. From one spring many streams flow, and that just never happens in nature. But he says it will happen in you. What does this mean? I believe this living water is the Holy Spirit's gift of grace. And when God's grace takes hold of your life, especially as you live to be with Jesus, that grace is going to flow from you to others, and to other portions of your life, and whatever grace in your life touches, there God is going to accomplish something, by his Holy Spirit's power.

One of those areas grace needs to touch is your relationships and especially your marriage. I said before that every sermon from Mother's Day to Father's Day was going to have something to do with marriage, and this is how we're going to tie it in. How does the stream of grace from the Holy Spirit touch this area of your life? Well there's a Bible passage where the Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD."

If God has given you the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, perhaps he'll grant this understanding and this wisdom from Scripture concerning, that there appears to be in Scripture three discernable stages to marriage. The first you find in the book the Song of Solomon. Call it the honeymoon stage. In that book of the Bible Solomon says, "Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the maidens." He is smitten! She says back, "Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my lover among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade and his fruit is sweet to my taste. He's taken me to the banquet hall and his banner over me is love. Strengthen me with raisins and refresh me with apples for I am faint with love." She's saying, I'm devastated by this guy, right? The honeymoon stage is characterized by intensity and excitement. She says, "Listen for my lover. Look! Here he comes leaping across the mountains bounding over the hills." Nothing will prevent them from being together and every opportunity for it is delightful. It's full of idealism. Solomon says, "All beautiful you are, my darling. There is no flaw in you." At least he doesn't see it! And how wonderful to have someone who thinks that highly of you. You're just floating. Everything seems great. The world seems great, you seem great, your mate seems great. You're in love and there's a bounce in your step. But, sadly, this stage is also characterized by ignorance. You don't really know all about that person, and chances are you are in love with an idealized image of the person you think you know.

In the honeymoon stage, conflicts and faults are ignored. But it can't last. Sooner or later the conflicts mount up, and stage one gives way to stage two, which I'll read about in Psalm 27. Notice the same guy wrote these words, as wrote the words we read before from the Song of Solomon: "A quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping on a rainy day. Restraining her is like restraining the wind or grasping oil with the hand." What happened? His delight turns to disillusionment. Dating turns to debating. Romance to resentment. The deal turns to the ordeal. This is stage two, sometimes called The Party's Over. It's the tension of real life. One man said, "I took her for better or worse, but she's a lot worse than I took her for." In stage two dullness and boredom sets into the marriage as you're occupied with life. "Anything you want, darling," often becomes, "Well, get it yourself." There are disagreements and defensiveness, disappointment and disillusionment, and general unhappiness. It's common, perhaps even natural in a relationship, but it's not supposed to be the end. At this point you either break up, or you resign yourself to live with unhappiness, we're just going to hang in there for the rest of our lives and be miserable, or you have a breakthrough to the third stage which is mature love. Not everyone gets there. I've read that the average marriage today lasts 7.2 years. That hardly seems time to get through the rough stage and into the good one. And the third stage can be better than the honeymoon, if now you know the real person, and you know how to love that person with faults and all anyway. You know how the Bible describes it: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth." You're tender, respectful, understanding, and truthful. You're honest, saying what you feel, while speaking in a loving way.

Jesus said come to me and within you you'll have streams of living water touching other lives and different areas of your life, and by this he meant the Holy Spirit. Jesus called the Holy Spirit the Spirit of truth. The truth we live by is that each of us is a

sinner saved by grace alone and full of faults ourselves. But we're called to love other imperfect people. The Bible says, "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." Confession and prayer heals. So does speaking the truth in love, and much patient listening, to get to stage three.

The Holy Spirit within you is also the Spirit of counsel and power. It's the power of God to change your life. Let's say you know your marriage or your life isn't where it needs to be. Who are you going to work on changing, yourself or your spouse? There's the old joke that at a wedding, first you walk down the aisle. Then you stand before the altar. Then, maybe you sing a hymn. Aisle, altar, hymn. After the marriage it turns to I'll alter him! But the gifts of the Spirit living in you all seem to relate to characteristics of you, not someone else. Work on your own negative traits. Nothing will so affect another person's attitude, than your own attitude toward them. If the love of Christ starts flowing out of you like living water, amazing things can happen, but you have to start with yourself and how God wants you to be. Do you sulk and pout and use the silent treatment? That's the opposite of speaking the truth lovingly. Do you ridicule? "Another spoon down the disposer? Are you blind? Only you could be so stupid!" But love is patient, and love is kind. Do you threaten or blame or yell? Then believe Jesus' words about the Spirit within you, the Spirit of power to live God's way.

Finally, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of "knowledge and the fear of the Lord." The only thing that can satisfy what you're looking for in life is the water that flows from Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is at work for you to come to him and drink, to put the Lord in first place in your life, and to walk in the presence of the Lord. Then the living water is in you.

After his military campaign, Lawrence of Arabia went home to London and took some of his Arab Chieftain acquaintances with him. It was their first trip outside the desert, and they were awed by everything they saw in the city. What impressed them most was the water faucets in the hotel rooms. Just think of such a wonderful thing to have as this treasure. You just turn the handle and water comes out. So the hotel management made a discovery after the Arabs left. They'd taken the faucets with them back to the desert, thinking how wonderful it would be to have some of these back home in their tents! They didn't understand that you needed the supply and the piping to make the water flow.

Christ Jesus said that from you would flow streams of living water, which is the Holy Spirit and his work. But you need to be connected to Jesus Christ. Come to me, he says. Follow his way first of all, and he will supply what your life is thirsty for. Amen.