

## **John 7:37-39**

Pentecost A + June 4, 2017

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church • Boise, Idaho

Pastor Tim Pauls

The Great Day of the Feast

The Word of the Lord from John 7:37: "On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.'" This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

It was the last day – the great day – of the Feast of Booths, established by God in Leviticus 23:34-36. Once a year, the people were to construct booths or tents outside their homes and live in them for a week's time. It was a harvest festival, but it was more than that. The people lived in tents to remember how their ancestors had lived in tents for the forty years they wandered in the wilderness, delivered from Egypt and going to the Promised Land.

They also remembered that the Lord had pitched His tent among them. He'd dwelt in the tabernacle in the middle of their camp. He never abandoned them in their wilderness years. He provided manna from heaven, and He made sure that they had water to drink – most famously, remember the time when Moses struck a rock and water flowed. As a reminder, the Feast of Booths featured a daily joyful ceremony called the "pouring of the water," with thanks to God for providing it. Water was drawn from the pool of Siloam, especially with Isaiah 12:3 in mind: "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." The water was poured out on the altar at the temple as a sacrifice. The Feast of Booths was a reminder that God was with His people to provide them salvation.

As the feast neared its conclusion, the seventh day featured a special service called the Great Hosanna. As the worshipers recited their prayers, they made sure to include Psalm 118:25: "Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success!" "Save us!" they'd pray: As part of these prayers, they'd confess that they came before God empty-handed. They would pray their hosannas, trusting that the Lord would give them salvation.

So as we look at the Gospel lesson, keep in mind the tents, the water and the Great Hosanna. It was Day 8, the great day, of the Feast of Booths. The people had been living in their tents for a week, remembering the wilderness and God's presence. They'd been celebrating the "pouring of the water," remembering how God had provided water in the wilderness and promised water from the wells of salvation. The day before, they'd recited the Great Hosanna, calling on God to save them, knowing that they were thirsty sinners in need of salvation.

On the eighth day of the feast – the great day, the day after the people cried out "Save us!" to the Lord, it turns out the Lord was there in the flesh. Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" The Fulfillment of the Feast of Booths Himself cried out to the people, because the festival had been decreed by God to point to the Savior.

Remember the tents. The Lord had dwelt among His people in the tabernacle while in the wilderness – now the Word had become flesh and dwelt among them (literally, He tented among them in John 1:14). As they continued waiting for deliverance to the Promised Land of heaven, the Son of God was present with them, fully God and fully man.

Remember the water. Jesus had become flesh to satisfy the thirst of the people with forgiveness, grace and life. Three chapters back, He declared to the Samaritan woman at the well, "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14). Jesus had come to give the water of life.

Remember the Great Hosanna. The people called out, "Hosanna! Save us now!" In response a day later, Jesus stood and cried out, "Come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"

The Feast pointed to Jesus. However, the work wasn't quite done. Our text notes, "Now this He said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

Jesus was not yet glorified. The work wasn't done. But, as we discussed last week, the glorification of Jesus wouldn't look very glorious. His hour of glory would come when He was arrested, tried, scourged, condemned and crucified. The Word had become flesh and tented among us so that His flesh could be nailed to the cross and His blood shed in our place.

He had come with the water of life. To save these thirsty, dying people, He'd be poured out as the Sacrifice for their sins (Psalm 22:14). As He took the place of mankind on the cross, He would cry out "I thirst:" not just a physical thirst, but a declaration that He was now the Sinner, forsaken and condemned by God in our place. As the rock struck in the wilderness once gave water to God's people, Jesus would be struck in the side with a spear – and blood and water would flow for our salvation.

And when the people cried out Hosanna, "Save us!", Jesus would answer their prayer, saving them by dying their death for their sin. Your death for your sin. That's how Jesus would be glorified – sacrificing Himself for the sins of the world.

One more point about our text: when Jesus promised living water, He was speaking about the Holy Spirit, who had not yet been given. The Spirit was around already – He is, after all, part of the omnipresent and eternal Godhead; but He'd not yet been given to give salvation in the means of grace following Jesus' death, because Jesus hadn't died yet. For that, the Spirit came at Pentecost. Which brings us to today.

+++

The Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. As you heard in our second lesson today (Acts 2:1-21), He came with the sound of a loud rushing wind and tongues of fire. The apostles immediately began to preach to the crowds outside, serious pilgrims who had made their way to Jerusalem for another appointed feast. Each heard the Word in his own language as the apostles preached in those assorted tongues. At the end of Peter's sermon, they were cut to the heart and asked, "What shall we do?" Peter responded, "Repent and be baptized." Three thousand were baptized that day. In the days that followed, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, the breaking of the bread: in other words, these baptized Christians devoted themselves to the Word and the Lord's Supper.

That is the Spirit's work: giving forgiveness and faith, life and salvation by means of the Word and Sacraments. Those are the means by which He calls people to repentance and faith. That is the living water you need in this wilderness world. By these means of grace, the Holy Spirit brings you to Jesus; because by these means of grace, the Holy Spirit brings Jesus to you.

That is the Spirit's work: His ongoing mission is not about loud rushing winds or tongues of fire. Those signaled the kickoff of the Church at Pentecost just like fireworks might mark the opening of a new football stadium before the teams get down to business. But loud rushing winds and tongues of fire don't give the forgiveness of sins. The means of grace do.

So your faith rejoices this day. You've been washed with living water. The Holy Spirit added God's Word to ordinary water and it became a Holy Baptism that washed your sins away. Jesus cried out, "Let whoever is thirsty come to Me," and His invitation gave the faith to bring you. In Holy Baptism, He joined you to His death. He said, "I was poured out and condemned on the cross for you; here, I share that death with you so that you don't have to die it yourself." In Holy Baptism, He joined you to His resurrection. He said, "As I live, you live also." That is the Holy Spirit's work. As you await deliverance from this parched wilderness to the Promised Land, He gives you this water of life, this forgiveness of sins.

The Holy Spirit keeps working through the Word, just as He did with those Christians at Pentecost. As the Word is proclaimed to you this day, Jesus Himself – the Word made flesh – is present with you. You confess your sins and cry your Hosannas – "Save us!", and Jesus says, "Here I am. I save you, because I forgive you for all of your sins."

The Holy Spirit brings you to the Feast – the Lord's Supper. And there, Christ gives you His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins – the same body and blood crucified and risen for you.

That is what the Holy Spirit does. He gives you living water – forgiveness, life and salvation. Even though your tent for this life – your flesh – will fail, the Lord promises that you already have eternal life, and He will raise you from the dead.

Here is the great temptation: you'll dismiss and neglect the Spirit's work. With all the stuff in this world that is sensual, fun, frightening, high-tech, worrisome, extreme and adrenalized, the Holy Spirit's work in the means of grace will look boring and ineffective. If you're sitting in ICU with all the machines and the tubes and the beeps, the Spirit's work in the means of grace will look futile, useless. Bombarded with all the things you have to do with your hectic schedule, sitting still to hear a sermon and have a little bread and wine will seem like poor use of your time (and teaching your kids to listen to the sermon will seem a poorer use still!). That is precisely how the devil wants you to view the Holy Spirit's work – because the Holy Spirit brings forgiveness, and the last thing the devil wants you to do is be forgiven.

Dear friends, remember how Jesus looked when He was glorified. He didn't look glorious: He looked battered, beaten, bleeding and dying. He looked ineffective, weak, useless, unable to save anyone. It wasn't glorious in man's eyes. But it was glorious in God's eyes because there Jesus sacrificed Himself to save you.

The Holy Spirit's work will appear less than glorious in the eyes of man, too. Apart from faith, it will look silly. It will look like water, bread, wine and words. But by faith, you say, "There is living water for me. That's where the Holy Spirit works to bring Jesus and grace to me." Your faith gets no thrill from loud rushing winds, tongues of fire, good health, extreme sports or high-tech gadgets – that's your flesh talking. No, your faith gets its life by clinging to Jesus. In His Word and Sacraments, Jesus says, "Here I am. Come to Me." By faith you say, "Amen. Let it be so." This is where He gives life – *eternal* life. Until His return on the Last Day, the Lord will never appear more glorious in this world than here, in His means of grace. There He bids, "Come to Me, for here I come to you: and I forgive you for all of your sins."

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen