

Homily for Pentecost, 2020

John 7:37-39

'The work of the Holy Spirit'

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TEXT – John 7:37-39

On 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.

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INTRODUCTION

So,

What do you make of the Holy Spirit?

We know we call out to God as our Father,

We know the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ,
Died and rose again for us and our salvation,

But what about the Holy Spirit?

What is his role?

What is his place in your life?

There are many ways one could answer those questions,
And many things one could say about the work of the Holy Spirit,

But for today on this festival of Pentecost,
We're going to consider specifically what we learn from our text,
about the work of the Holy Spirit.

Our Gospel reading is just three short verses,
John chapter 7 verses 37,38 and 39,

And so for today we'll see three things, one for each verse,
about the Spirit's work,

First his work in quenching the deep thirst of our souls,

Second the Spirit's work in flowing through us as a life-giving river,

And third his work as it connects to Jesus being glorified.

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QUENCHING OUR DEEP THIRST

So we begin with verse 37 and the first part of verse 38.

'On 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,³⁸ and let the one who believes in me drink.'

Jesus had come to the Jerusalem for the festival of tabernacles or booths,
One of the three great pilgrim festivals each year,

At this festival the people remembered God's faithfulness to them in their journey through
the wilderness,
where they lived in tents or tabernacles or booths.

According to the Rabbis there were also some interesting rituals at this festival involving
water.

One commentator writes,

*'The worshippers at the festival of Tabernacles looked expectantly to a future time when
life-giving waters will flow from the temple and invigorate the land,
Just like water flowed for the ancestors from the rock in the wilderness.'* Bruner quoting Yee,
487

In this context,

Jesus stood up and cried out loudly,

That this life-giving water would in fact flow from him,

That to truly quench that deep thirst in the soul a person needs to believe in him,

And later on we read that in all of this he speaking especially about the work of the Spirit.

There is in the human heart,
Deep in the soul of every person,
Something like a thirst isn't there?

A desire for satisfaction that we never seem to attain,

A yearning for something more than we can find in this life,

It's this deep thirst that makes the wealthy pursue more wealth,
The powerful pursue more power,
And the famous go after ever more fame.

We have this deep thirst,
And the Bible would tell us that at some level this desire is for God,

But it's in our sinful and broken condition that these desires become disordered,

It's like we can't tune them in to the right frequency,

And so we go looking to all sorts of other people and places in life to try and quench this
thirst,
And finding that nothing truly satisfies.

Where do you go other than the Lord Jesus,
To try and quench that inner thirst?

Jesus says come to him,
Believe in him,

as you do so he will send you his Holy Spirit to quench that inner thirst.

Just think for a moment about the fruit of the Spirit which we read about in Galatians 5,

this is, in other words, what the Spirit wants to work in you:

Love,
Joy,
Peace,
Patience,

*Kindness,
Generosity,
Faithfulness,
Gentleness,
and Self-control.'*

Aren't these exactly the sorts of things all people are searching for,
To quench that inner thirst of the soul?

Well, come to Jesus and drink!

Trust in him and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,

And let him work these in you,

To quench that inner thirst.

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FLOWING AS A LIFE-GIVING RIVER

Now let's look at the work of the Spirit as a life-giving river in verse 38.

Jesus says,

'As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water." Now this he said about the Spirit...

So the imagery is still in the realm of water,

But now it's not just a thirsty person getting a drink,
It's about mighty flowing river,
Or in fact multiple rivers or streams,
It's plural,

There's a sense of overflowing here,
Of abundance.

Rivers are extremely important and significant to our life as human communities aren't they?

Every where you go in the world,
You find the major cities built next to the great rivers.

Even here in Adelaide,
Our city is where it is partly because of the great and might river Torrens,

(And for those not from Adelaide that's a bit of an inside joke,
If you look up the river Torrens you'll get it)

You see this in an even more dramatic way in a place like Egypt,
Where so much of the country is arid and dry and life-less,

But then along the river Nile is where everything springs to life.

In the Old Testament perhaps our minds go to places like Psalm 1,

*'They are like trees planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper.'*

Now,
Notice that our translation said that this river of life-giving water,
Which we understand to be about the Holy Spirit and his work,

Is said to flow from the believer's heart.

Now of course in the first place the Spirit is given by Jesus,

But then in a secondary way it can be that it flows from the believer out.

It's important that we see that we don't possess the Spirit as if he's an object,

We continually receive the Spirit as we might step into the continual flow of a river,

And the Spirit then flows through us and out of us,
To others.

Luther emphasized this aspect of the text in one of his writings, he says:

*'Streams of living water are to flow forth, Jesus says. The person who come to Me I shall equip,
Not only to be refreshed and satisfied and to quench his own thirst,
But also to become a study, earthen vessel, endowed with the Holy Spirit,
And with gifts that enable him to give consolation and strength to many other people and to serve them, as he was served by Me'. Quoted in Bruner, 489*

Think back to some of the fruit of Spirit,
Like 'Love, kindness, generosity...'

They aren't only characteristics for our personal satisfaction,
But they have this outward thrust too,

The river of the Spirit and his work flowing through us to others.

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WHEN JESUS IS GLORIFIED

Finally then,
We consider the Spirit's work in connection with when Jesus is glorified.

Verse 39,

*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.*

This is a fairly dramatic thing to say.

And to avoid misunderstanding it's good for us to be clear that when Christians speak of the Holy Spirit,
We are speaking of the third person of the Holy Trinity,
Who is eternal,
Who has always been,

And whose work we read about right through the Old Testament.

So Jesus isn't saying the Holy Spirit never existed up until this point.

But what he is pointing us to is that there is a very profound sense in which the fullness of the Spirit's work comes with Jesus being glorified.

Now what does that mean?

Well it sounds strange at first,

But Jesus makes it fairly clear in this Gospel that he is glorified as he goes to his death,
And as he rises again from the dead and ascends to the Father.

But especially his death on the cross,
Is the time of his glorification.

It's interesting that when Jesus is on the cross,
These themes from our text show up again.

He bowed his head,
And gave up his Spirit,
Or we could translate,
He handed over the Spirit.

And when they pierced his side with a spear,
'at once blood and water came out'.

Remember too what Jesus said about the Spirit,
'He will glorify me,
Because he will take what is mine and declare it to you'. John 16:14

And when the Holy Spirit comes powerfully as hear in the book of Acts,
This is what happens!

The Apostles preach Christ and his death and resurrection,

People come to faith in Jesus,
They call on the name of the Lord and are saved!

The Spirit's work is especially connected with Jesus' being glorified,

Because the Holy Spirit's work is to take all that Jesus did and apply it to us.

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And all of this happens in the worship life of the Church,

Remember that image of the Spirit's work as a life-giving river.

As we gather to listen to Jesus' word which he says is 'Spirit and life',

As we are forgiven our sins, which Jesus told the Apostles to do right after he breathed on them his Spirit,

As we receive the body and blood of Jesus,

The Holy Spirit flows into the church,

And brings us all the benefits of Christ's death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead,

and flows through and out of the church as the people of God today love and serve and witness in the world.

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CONCLUSION

There is the work of the Holy Spirit,

In quenching that inner thirst,
In flowing in us and through us,
In bringing us to Christ and Christ to us.

If you've never come to him or have been away from him,
There is here an invitation especially for you,

To absolutely anyone who is thirsty,

Come and drink!
Come and believe in Jesus Christ!
Receive the Holy Spirit and his work in your life.

But for all of us,
May we never stop coming to Jesus and receiving this life-giving flow of the Spirit's work in each one of us. ***Come Holy Spirit come, Amen.***