

JOHN 7:37–39. (EHV)

On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and called out, **“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink! As the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from deep within the person who believes in me.”** By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were going to receive. For the Holy Spirit had not yet come, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.

The festival that John is talking about here, the festival during which Jesus stood up and cried out, was the Festival of Booths or Tabernacles. It was a seven-day festival that took place in the seventh month of the Jewish religious calendar, which means that this year it begins on September 29. So why are we talking about words that Jesus said during a different festival in the fall on a day when we are celebrating the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the festival of Pentecost in the spring?

It’s because the words Jesus said on that particular autumn day tell us about the blessings we now enjoy as a result of what happened on Pentecost. Jesus tells us that we may now drink living water and give others living water to drink.

1. Drink

The Festival of Booths or Tabernacles was an interesting festival. First, as the name suggests, it was basically a mandatory campout. It was a festival during which the Jewish people lived in tabernacles or tents. Our tents tend to be triangular, but theirs were rectangular booths. They had four posts holding up canvas walls and roofs constructed out of branches. The people built them on the roofs of their houses or in their yards, if they lived in Jerusalem. Otherwise they constructed them in the temple courtyard, in the city squares of Jerusalem, or on the property of friends in Jerusalem. They then lived in those tents or booths as much as they could. They ate their meals in them and they also slept in them, if the weather permitted.

Second, it was a festival of rejoicing, not just because it occurred around the time of the fruit harvest, when grapes, dates, figs, olives, and citrus fruits were available in abundance, but also because God specifically commanded them to rejoice before him with some of their fruit, palm fronds, and branches.

Third, it was an unsolvable math problem. It was a seven-day festival that had an eighth day. The Lord consistently commanded them to celebrate the Festival of Booths for seven days, but then also told them to hold a sacred assembly and offer special sacrifices on the eighth day. It was almost as if he wanted them to consider the eighth day merely an extension of the seventh day, or to consider the eighth day as existing outside the framework of time.

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, it was a countdown. There were special sacrifices that had to be offered on each of the days—bulls, rams, and year-old lambs without defect. But the number of bulls was different every day—thirteen, then twelve, then eleven, then ten, then nine, then eight, then seven. And then, on the eighth day, one bull. Two rams on each of the first seven days. On the eighth day, one ram. Fourteen year-old lambs without defect on each of the first seven days. On the eighth day, only half that number, seven. Everything was building up to the eighth day. Also on the eighth day, the Jewish people no longer had to live in their tabernacles or booths. After celebrating in the service at the temple, they once again gathered and

celebrated in their homes. So it was a festival that kind of imitated their desert wandering and reaching of the Promised Land—starting out living in tabernacles, but ending with them going to a permanent home.

By Jesus's day the festival also featured a water pouring ritual, even though the Lord did not give any regulations about such a ritual. Each day of the festival, one pitcher was filled with spring water from the Pool of Siloam and another pitcher was filled with wine. The pitcher of water was emptied in a special basin on one side of the altar and the pitcher of wine was emptied in a special basin on the other side. When this was done during the sacred assembly on the first and eighth days, the people supposedly recited Isaiah 12:3: "With joy you shall draw water from the wells of salvation."

So it was on the eighth day of this festival, probably after the sacred assembly, probably with this water pouring ritual and this passage from Isaiah fresh on their minds, that Jesus stood up and called out, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink! As the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from deep within the person who believes in me." Notice how Jesus is saying two things: First, he is telling us to drink from him. Second, he is telling us that if we drink from him, we will then have streams flowing from deep within us that we're able to share with others so that they can drink too.

Let's start with the first, that if we are thirsty, we should come to Jesus and drink from him. Jesus is clearly not talking about physical thirst. He makes that clear right away: "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink! As the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from deep within the person *who believes in me*." In other words, we drink from the water of Jesus when we believe in Jesus.

But what is the thirst that is satisfied by believing in Jesus? Jesus helps us out by saying, "As the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from deep within the person who believes in me." Now before we talk about where Scripture says that, we need to note that Jesus is telling us something here about how carefully and thoughtfully we want us to read and listen to and study his Word. The fact is that there is no passage in the Old Testament that explicitly says, "Streams of living water will flow from deep with the person who believes in the Anointed One." In fact, the phrase "streams of living water" all by itself does not occur in the Old Testament. Jesus is paraphrasing several passages from Isaiah, but we're only going to know that he is referring to those passages if we're listening carefully to his Word.

The first passage that should come to mind is the passage that the people had recited more than once in the temple during the festival, Isaiah 12:3: "With joy you shall draw water from the wells of salvation." Jesus is clearly implying that he is the well of salvation.

In Isaiah 43, God talks about how in the past, when he delivered the people from slavery in Egypt, he caused dry ground to appear where there was water. But now, he says he is going to do the opposite: "I am about to do a new thing. Now it will spring up. Don't you know about it? Indeed I will make a road in the wilderness. In the wasteland I will make rivers. The wild animals, the jackals and ostriches, will honor me, because I am providing water in the wilderness, rivers in a parched wasteland, water for my chosen people to drink."

In Isaiah 41, he says, "The afflicted and the poor seek water, but there is none. Their tongues are parched with thirst. I, the LORD, I myself will answer them. I, the God of Israel, will

not leave them. I will open rivers on the barren heights. In the middle of valleys there will be springs. I will turn the wilderness into a pool of water, and the dry land will pour out water.”

In Isaiah 35, when he talks about the Messiah healing the blind, the deaf, the crippled, and the mute, he says, “Waters will flow in the wilderness, and streams in the wasteland. The burning sand will become a pool, and in the thirsty ground there will be springs of water. There will be grass, reeds, and rushes where the haunts of jackals once lay.”

When the prophets talk about unclean wild animals, they are often talking about unbelievers, people who are spiritually unclean, people unfamiliar with God’s word. So the thirst he is describing is the thirst that people have without God’s word—the thirst for meaning, the thirst for a higher purpose, the thirst for inner peace and a clear conscience, the thirst for deep and lasting happiness, the thirst for truth, the thirst for hope beyond the grave.

You have encountered that thirst. I remember showing up for work at my first regular job at the Parks and Recreation Department in Neillsville, Wisconsin. My boss began by giving us a pep talk: “Hopefully by now you’ve all discovered the meaning of life, and the meaning of life is that you have to work.” Spiritually thirsty. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, my wife and I were on a walk and passed a couple of older ladies conversing with each other. The one was asking the other what she was up to. She replied in an agitated voice, “Well, just like everyone else, sitting at home and pondering my mortality.” Spiritually thirsty. While waiting for a haircut at the barbershop once, I heard the young man who was getting his hair cut say to the barber, “You would think that by now we would have discovered our purpose.” Spiritually thirsty.

Jesus is saying he alone can satisfy this thirst. He had said something similar to the Samaritan woman at the well: “Whoever drinks the water I will give him will never be thirsty ever again. Rather, the water I will give him will become in him a spring of water, bubbling up to eternal life.”

But notice the commentary John gives after Jesus’s words: “By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were going to receive. For the Holy Spirit had not yet come, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.” In other words, even those who were already following Jesus at the time didn’t yet have the full measure of what he wanted to give them. It wasn’t until he would rise from the dead, ascend into heaven, and pour out the Holy Spirit from on high that those who believed in him would truly drink deeply from his blessings.

Guess what, brothers and sisters? Today we’re celebrating the fact that Jesus has been glorified. We’re celebrating the fact that he has now given and poured out the Holy Spirit on believers in rich and full measure. That means that for those of us who believe in Jesus, we have a spring of eternal strength and refreshment bubbling up from deep within us—a source of purpose, joy, peace, truth, hope, and life. But even though it bubbles up from deep within us, its source isn’t us or anything in us. Its source is the Holy Spirit, who is given through God’s word and sacraments.

Jesus pours out his Spirit in his Word and sacraments. So drink the living water that flows there.

2. Give to Drink

But notice that Jesus doesn't just say that streams of living water will flow *in* us; he says they will flow *from* us. Isaiah prophesied that too in connection with the Messiah: "Each person will be...like streams of water in the desert" (Isa. 32:2). When God pours out his Spirit on us, the Spirit isn't content just to sit inside us. Like a stream, he is constantly active, constantly wanting to flow out from us to others. Notice when Paul mentions the famous fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5, he doesn't just mention things that benefit us. Most of what he lists benefits others—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

In other words, don't just drink from Jesus now that Pentecost has happened and the Spirit has been poured out in rich and full measure. Give others to drink from him too. Put your purpose, peace, joy, and hope, put your certainty of the truth on display for others. Do things that are in their best interests, not your own. Be patient with them, not quick-tempered. Be kind to them, not mean or indifferent. Be generous to them, not stingy. Be faithful to them in your words and in your work, not dishonest and deceptive. Be gentle to them, not harsh or rude.

This isn't so much a matter of creating anything new in your life, but in letting out who you already are, letting out the person the Spirit made you to be in your baptism. Don't plug up or dam up the well he has dug deep within you. Let the streams of living water Jesus has given you to drink flow to others too.

Drink from Jesus, and give him to others to drink too. God grant us his Holy Spirit that we may do so, to his glory. Amen.