

## “Living Water”

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First Presbyterian Church  
Sunday, March 9, 2014

New Testament Lesson: John 7:37-46

Old Testament lesson: Psalm 42:1-6

We tend to take water for granted in this country. But as we've learned from church members like Cameron Klim, the Vansandts, Betty Beals, Durinda Carr and Madison Corlew – who have been on mission trips to other countries – water is as precious as it gets. You can not live without water.

When I was serving on mission trips to the Dominican Republic, we began by digging latrines because there were no toilets in the refugee villages we served. So for the first five or six years, we dug latrines and treated the people for the parasites they'd get from drinking fouled water.

As their trust of us grew, we began teaching them how to purify water using chemicals and filters. But they didn't like the taste of treated water and couldn't manage the process of filtration for themselves.

So after a couple more years trying that approach, we began to dig wells for them and teach them new ways to treat, filter and store the well water. All that work just to get them drinkable water, as if their life depended upon it. And it did.

In Our New Testament lesson, Jesus uses water as a symbol or metaphor in teaching about the Holy Spirit. “Out of the believer's heart” he says “shall flow rivers of living water. ... Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink.” And John tells us that Jesus “said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet” says John, “there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

Can you imagine life without the Holy Spirit to guide us and protect us? Yet that's what life was like before Jesus' death and resurrection. Imagine what that would be like; life without the Holy Spirit. Perhaps we can best imagine it using the same symbolism Jesus used: water. Let's take the following eight facts about the scarcity of water and substitute the words Holy Spirit in place of water.

I'll read the first one using the word water first, then read it a second time substituting water with Holy spirit. According to the World Health Organization (March 2009), water scarcity depends on how communities conserve and distribute water, as well as on household and industrial demand. Thus, scarcity can and does occur even in areas where there is adequate rainfall and fresh water. Or to use the Holy Spirit, Spirit scarcity depends on how communities

conserve and distribute the Holy Spirit, as well as on household and industrial demand. Thus, scarcity can and does occur even in areas where the Spirit is plentiful. In other words, people fail to connect with the Holy Spirit not because the Holy Spirit is deficient, but because our conservation and distribution of the Spirit is deficient.

Fact No. 2: One in three people on every continent is affected by Holy-Spirit scarcity, so to speak. (Remember, the fact is actually about water, but go with me here in substituting the Holy Spirit).

Fact 3: Twenty percent of the world's population lives in places where water – where the Holy Spirit – is scarce. Twenty-five percent live in developing countries that lack the infrastructure to access the Holy Spirit.

No. 4: When the Holy Spirit is scarce, people must resort to unsafe Spirits and can't bathe or cleanse themselves adequately.

5: Poor Spirit quality increases the risk of deadly diseases.

6: When the Spirit is scarce, people tend to store the Holy Spirit in their homes, where it can become contaminated and breed pests. In other words, maybe when the Spirit is scarce, it's because churches are keeping it for themselves for fear that they will lose something of value if they freely give of themselves through the Holy Spirit. Maybe churches get too wrapped up in doing things for themselves. Just two more facts.

No. 7: Good Spirit management is essential to reducing ... breeding sites for pests that transmit a number of diseases.

And finally No.8, more than 10 percent of the world's population consume food (or TV, or Internet, or Gaming session, or sexual encounters, or you name it) or whatever that has been irrigated by wastewater or, if you will, washed in a foul and unhealthy Spirit. Interesting.

Now let's go back to our Scripture lesson and see how this substitution of the concept of the Holy Spirit tracks with Jesus' meaning and use of the words water. John tells us that after Jesus taught about the Holy Spirit using "Living Water" as a metaphor, "some in the crowd said, 'This is really the prophet.' Others said, 'This is the Messiah.' But some asked, 'Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he? Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?'

"So there was a division in the crowd because of (Jesus). Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, 'Why did you not arrest him?' The police answered, 'Never has anyone spoken like this!'

If we read that section with the Holy Spirit in mind, we see that Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit into a confused even a hostile world in which, yes, some people believe and others question; some wrestle with the facts, while others misunderstand or misuse the Bible – “has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?”

Jesus is teaching about the power of God and the free-flowing, life-giving Holy Spirit and there are those who would try to use the Bible to control God and foul the Spirit.

By disputing Jesus’ connection to the line of David – which Scripture actually affirms – and misunderstanding his connection to Bethlehem as a birthplace rather than a town of residence, these people not only miss out on the truth of scripture as revealed by the Holy Spirit, they actually fight against it.

For Scripture to be truly life giving, it must be read with our hearts and minds firmly resting in the Holy Spirit, no, not resting!, active in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is what activates the Living Word of God, which are the scriptures. Water alone, the words in the Bible alone, won’t cut it. We need the Holy Spirit to reveal their true meaning, to reveal Jesus Christ in our midst. One part scripture to 5 parts Holy Spirit, or something like that.

It’s like the mother of eight from Darlington, Maryland, who came home from a neighbor’s house to find five of her youngest children huddled together, concentrating with intense interest on something. As she slipped near them, trying to discover the center of attraction, she couldn’t believe her eyes. Smack dab in the middle of the circle were several baby skunks. She screamed at the top of her voice, “Children, run!” And with that each kid grabbed a skunk and ran!<sup>1</sup>

Now let’s see water alone clean up that mess, unfoul those children. Scripture alone can’t keep us from bad situations in life just like water alone without plenty of a little tomato juice would be of no use to that mother of eight.

But we’re not in this thing alone. Jesus has sent us the Holy Spirit to guide us, protect us, and cleanse us. And some believe and accept and some don’t.

In completing that section of today’s Scripture reading, John says that Jesus’ words led to “a division in the crowd. ... There was a division in the crowd “because of (Jesus),” and he notes that “some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.”

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<sup>1</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Hand Me Another Brick* (Nashville: W. Publishing Group, 1978), 81. All Rights reserved. Used by permission.

Just like no one back then could arrest Jesus apart from God's will, no one today can arrest the Holy Spirit – stop the Holy Spirit – when God sends it on its way. Jesus and his words and his Spirit cannot be arrested or stopped or pigeonholed. They can be ignored, but that is to our own peril. When we ignore the freedom and power of the Holy Spirit, we get left behind, or we get chipped away at, or overwhelmed, or we stop growing, or become covered in filth.

I mean think about what water is capable of doing. Water as rain makes things grow, as does the Holy Spirit. A stream reshapes the land and can carve away mountains, just like the Holy Spirit reshapes us and carves away our rough edges. Water sustains life on this planet, quenches our thirst, cleanses us of filth, and, when we ignore the power of water, it can drown us and sweep us away as if we never existed.

Woe to the person who ignores or abuses the power and freedom of the Holy Spirit! Woe to the church or the family or even the workplace or school that flies in the face of the Spirit of God.

Jesus, knowing that we would need to be led in the faith after his death and resurrection, sent us the Holy Spirit. Our choice is simple: we either go with where the Holy Spirit is taking us or we get swept away by some misguided spirit.

As we enter into the Holy season of Lent, let us do so searching for where the Holy Spirit is working in our lives, let us do so praying for the strength and the courage and the wisdom to faithfully follow its leading. Amen.

### **Pastoral Prayer**

Come, Holy Spirit, instill in us a desire to deepen our relationship with you, to listen for where your Spirit guides us to go.

Come, Holy Spirit, breathe fire into your church today; move us from complacency to action, actively furthering your kingdom.

Come, Holy Spirit, into the world, instilling a desire in your people to care for all of creation so the beauty of your earth remains for future generations.

Come, Holy Spirit, and stir up unrest in our hearts for all those places in the world where water is unsafe to drink and where people go hungry for lack of food.

Inspire us to do something that makes a difference. Come, Holy Spirit, bring peace to a broken world.

Come, Holy Spirit, comfort those who mourn, heal those who are ill, bring light to those in darkness.

We pray all this trusting in your promise of new life in Jesus Christ, our risen Savior, who taught us to pray, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.