

Filled to Overflowing
Exodus 17: 1-7, Acts 2: 1-21, John 7: 37-39
Eastminster Presbyterian Church
May 31, 2020...Pentecost

The same Spirit that moved over the waters breathing new life into creation and danced with the people birthing the Christian church, continues to stir within us today. The Spirit is a source of joy, with the continual reminder that Jesus is for us living water. The Spirit continues to work God's purposes in and through us to build and build up the church, the body of Christ, here on this earth.

Speaking of earth, my Dad, Ray Parks loved gardening. In his retirement years he delighted in providing fruits and vegetable for us and our neighbors. From sun-up to sun-down, you would find him planting, hoeing, watering. He nurtured the seeds with love and care. The one thing that could break his concentration, though, the Mason jar, in the refrigerator, filled with thirst-quenching water. "There's nothing like a glass of ice-cold water!" he always said.

When one is thirsty, there is nothing like water!

The weary travelers in our Old Testament lesson are thirsty, if from nothing else, the power of suggestion. At this Festival-Feast of the Tabernacles that celebrates the harvested crops, pitchers filled with water from the pool of Siloam passed by them. Many had journeyed great distances to give thanks to God for the rain and the crops it brought to life. In raspy, dry voices, we imagine them joyfully shouting out, "O give thanks to the Lord, for the Lord is good; the Lord's steadfast love endures forever!

The priests would pour jars of cool, refreshing water into silver funnels, so much so that they would be filled to overflowing. At this great party, the people remembered that no one knew better about thirst than their wilderness-wandering ancestors, the Israelites. At this celebration, much as we do at family gatherings, they would retell their story, remembering how God freed their ancestors from captivity as they danced into the desert with joy. But they also recalled that with time, the celebrating turned to complaining: "Moses, Aron" they moaned, "why did you bring us to this parched place? At least in Egypt we had water to drink!"

God heard their pleas, and God called out to Moses, "strike that rock with your staff." And from the dry and lifeless stone, life-giving water flowed, overflowed. Their physical thirst was quenched.... for a while. Like their ancestors before

them, these festivalgoers understood that they would be thirsty again at some time and without water, there is not holding on to life.

As my Dad approached the end of his earthly life, on more than one occasion, I heard from his lips, “I am thirsty.” There was nothing like a cold drink from that Mason jar. As physically thirsty as he would get, I knew that the thirst of his spirit had, at some point in his 85 years been quenched. It was a good life, one shared by a spouse for 62 years, one that had helped create eight children and one that found joy in the simple things of life: laughter, family, neighbors. Dad understood the absolute need of water for both body and soul. Just as the Israelites were given God’s refreshing and restoring water in the desert, Dad trusted that Jesus, the source of living water, had quenched his thirst for all times through the gift of saving grace.

This is the message Jesus is proclaiming as he stands at the Festival and says, “I am the source of living water. If you are thirsty, come to me! Trust in me and I will satisfy your thirsting soul.” Jesus continues to speak to us. For what are we thirsting?

With hopeful hearts, we yearn to believe in the transforming power of Jesus and in the sustaining power of the Pentecostal Spirit. Our physical thirst can be temporarily quenched with a glass of water, yet bodily thirst requires on-going attention. Through Jesus, our thirst can be quenched for all times, but we seem to need to be reminded of that, and certainly, living a life of gratitude requires on-going intentionality on our part.

In the desert, God’s people wavered between faithfulness and unfaithfulness. They moved from comfort to complaining; from delight in the Lord to doubt in the Lord’s presence. Are we any different? The greater question: do we want to be different? If so, we, and we as Christ’s church, born of Pentecostal fire and flames and winds already have a way to that comfort and delight...an Advocate, a Friend called the Holy Spirit.

We do not have to worry about filling our own wells. Through the power of the Spirit, we have the source of living water, our Lord, abiding in us, ready to quench our thirst and to sustain us with life-giving water as we, in the name of Jesus, become for others a respite in their times of spiritual and physical drought. Ready to sustain us as we, in the name of Jesus, share the good news of God’s saving grace. So good is God, that our thanksgiving should be filled to overflowing in proclaiming the story of salvation, in serving as our Lord served others with

prayer, time, energy, resources, money, hearts. This is a message of doing, yes, but more than that, a message about “how” we do. Whenever and however we serve and give, we are to do so from a heart filled with gratitude because it is right to give our thanks and praise to God! Through Jesus Christ, God has chosen to redeem the goodness that was breathed into us, saving us despite our sinful nature. That is reason for joy and reason to witness to that great joy. Jesus said it best: Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water!

Pat and Roger, a young couple in my hometown hit a dry spell—emotionally and spiritually. With a very sick child and mounting medical bills, feeding their family was a struggle and they were wrestling with the age-old question, “Why, the suffering, God?” Through prayer, time, energy, Christ’s church, the people, were there for them.

In my Dad’s small country store, it was not uncommon to buy food on credit, paying as one could. On more than one occasion, I saw him throw credit slips into a trashcan. One pitch, the debt erased. For a time, those slips had Pat’s and Roger’s names on them. With thankful hearts, years later, this couple volunteered to help us drive Dad and others in our little community to doctor’s appointments.

Thirst for Pat and Roger manifested itself in the fear that they could not provide food and drink for their children. I am not sure for what my Dad’s soul was thirsting, but at some point in his life, he accepted the invitation to drink in that gift of saving grace because he believed that Jesus was the source of living water. He believed in the overflowing goodness of God so fully, that he showed the story of salvation to others. He believed in the overflowing goodness of God so fully, that he took seriously Christ’s command to love neighbor. Sometimes that neighbor’s name he knew, other times the neighbor was a stranger, often a wanderer who had hopped off the train; and there were times when only a situation of need was known, no names needed.

I suspect you all have known and loved some “Ray Parks and some Rogers and Pats” in your life. The gift of Pentecost, this birth of the Christian church, is our reminder that the Spirit was and is and will ever be for us living water. But that living water is never for us alone. We are called, brothers and sisters in Christ, to weave our lives in and out of the lives of others, being for them the presence of our Lord, in the joy-filled and the dry times of life.

Weaving in and out is what a treasured necklace does that my brothers and sisters gave to me one Christmas in gratitude for caring for our parents when they were

ill. Made from pieces of gold that each of them had melted, its weavings are wrapped in such a way that you cannot tell where it begins or ends. Does not matter...I know its origin is love.

As Christ's disciples we may not know how or when we will be called to weave in and out of the lives of those who are thirsting. What matters is that we believe that the love that flows through us and through this living organism we call church, Eastminster, begins and ends with our Lord who is the source of life-giving water.

While the physical waters of life no longer flow through my Dad, the Christ in him and in all believers, lives on, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the lives that Christ touches through us. The incredible promise in this passage is that for all who are thirsty, Jesus provides drink—the gift of grace, salvation for our souls. And the only response the gift asks of us is that, in gratitude and with joy, we share.

May the gift of Christ's living water and the wind-blowing power of the Holy Spirit be in and among us, filled to overflowing so that others may never be thirsty again. Amen.