

Come, Drink and Live!

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Our first Scripture reading this morning is from Exodus 17:1-7.

17 All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" ³ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" ⁴ So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." ⁵ And the LORD said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶ Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ And he called the name of the place Massah^[a] and Meribah,^[b] because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Our second Scripture reading this morning is from the Gospel of John 7:37-39. I'll be reading from the alternate translation of the English standard version. For reasons I'll share shortly.

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. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' " 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.

This is God's Word.

My name is Gregg Norfleet, and I serve as the director of counseling ministry here at Briarwood. My wife, Cindy and I are originally from North Carolina, although these last few years we've been up in Grand Rapids, Michigan. We came to Birmingham almost three months ago and we thought that we had left behind the cold. Not so. We're excited to grow and to serve among you, and we're so grateful for the warm welcome that you have extended to us.

You know that the Bible begins and concludes in a garden. But, in between, like the Israelites of old, we journey through the wilderness. And of course, even in the desert, we see and taste good gifts. 2023 has had lots of good. But as Christians, we are not yet home, are we? In the desert, we see and suffer hard knocks. 2023 has been filled with lots of hard for Briarwood Church. What might we expect in 2024? Well, unless the Lord tarries, we continue to journey through the wilderness. Now in the wilderness, it is easy to lose your way, to lose your hope. Trouble comes against you, a struggle wells up inside of you and you need help right then, right there. Right where your life actually unfolds. Where life happens. And in the wilderness. You need a word of God's truth, spoken in love. A word that is simple. A word that

is memorable. A word that is accessible in the moment. A word that locates you in the real world. A world that pledges real help. Timely, tailored grace from the living, “working on the scene” Redeemer. You need a word that summonses you to real trust. Living, dependent faith in this giver of grace.

John 7: 37- 39 has been this word for me for 30 years. And on this last day of 2023, I offer it to you as the word that can sustain and transform you in 2024.

This morning we will consider, first of all, the **occasion**. Secondly will consider the **proclamation** and finally, we'll look at the Apostle John's own interpretation. Consider with me, first, the **occasion**.

On the last day of the feast, the great day, (37), it's the Feast of Tabernacles, instituted and given to the Israelites by the Lord in Leviticus 23. It was a weeklong festival in the fall, in mid-October, by our calendar, and it was a festival of thanksgiving where the people of God gave thanks to God for sending the rain from heaven to produce the harvest of grapes and olives. But more. It was a feast that trained God's people to look back and give thanks to God's salvation in the past.

But not only so, it pointed forward to God's salvation to come in the future. And it was a festival that was filled with very vivid symbols of three types. First of all, the people came to Jerusalem, and they camped in little huts made from palm myrtle and willow branches. All week long, you might say the people of God were “happy campers,” but it was a signpost of the Lord teaching His people.

Look back and remember the *Exodus* from Egypt. The day when I pitched my tent among you. But, not only look back, look forward and anticipate a better *exodus* -- a new day when I will dwell with you forever.

Secondly, the people came to worship at the temple. It was a very vivid picture of God's dwelling place, intricately designed to remind God's people of the Garden of Eden. But it was a signpost teaching God's people to look back and remember the entrance into the Promised Land, a foretaste of your return to Eden. But don't simply look back - also look forward because the day is coming when I will give my people a better entrance, a new day when I will lead you into a much better Eden.

Thirdly, the High Priest would lead the people through a dramatic imagery liturgy. The priesthood would take a picture and he would walk down to the pool of Siloam, and he would dip it into the water. And then he would lead the people back to the temple. He would walk around the altar. The choir would sing (Psalm 113, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18) and the people would shout, citing Isaiah 2. Lift up your hands, and the priest would pour the water into a basin to the east and then he would pour wine into a basin to the west and the people would shout from Isaiah 12. You will draw water from the wells of salvation.

And all of this took place once a day for six days. But on the last day, the great day of the feast, he would lead this liturgy seven times over. It was a signpost teaching God's people to look back and remember the saving waters that flowed from the Rock of Moses. But it was also a signpost that was teaching God's people to look forward to the saving waters that would flow from a new temple.

The prophets could see it from a distance, standing on tiptoe, looking down the corridors of time. Isaiah the Prophet could see it. Isaiah 35:6 *Waters will break forth in the wilderness. Then will the eyes of the blind will be open and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap like a deer and the tongue of the mute sing for joy?*

Zachariah, the Prophet, could see it from a distance. Zachariah 14 - *On that day, living waters will flow from Jerusalem.* Ezekiel, the Prophet, could see it. Do you remember that very strange vision he had in Ezekiel 47? A vision of water flowing from the new temple. It began to leak. It began to trickle. It began to flow ankle deep. But it continued to flow and to rise. And it became knee deep. And it continued to flow until it was waist deep. And it continued to flow until you could swim in the river. In Ezekiel, the Prophet writes, *Wherever the river goes, everything will live.*

Now, let me ask you, are you not thirsty this morning? In the Bible, thirst is a symptom of living in the wilderness. It describes the person who is wakeful to their spiritual poverty. The person understands the double trouble. On the one hand, you understand the evil that comes against you. It's the problem of suffering a loss of relationship, of capacity, the loss of a dream, a trauma, a brush with death, words spoken to you, actions committed against you. And so, you thirst for God's shelter and comfort.

But on the other hand, there's the evil that springs up inside you. It's the deeper problem of sin living in me and sin living in you. The Scriptures variously describe this deepest problem of deceitful desires, the last of the flesh, passions that wage war and seek to rule your heart. It's like the hijacker unbeknownst, sitting in row 17, seat B and he gets up and storms the cockpit to take control of your heart. I love how one African-American pastor puts it -- ***sin living in me and the sin living in you will find you and blind you and bind you*** ---Do you feel it? Are you thirsty for God's pardon in God's power?

Are you not thirsty? This is our fallen condition. Where will we go? To find water that will quench our thirst. If you are thirsty, then I want you to lean forward. Listen carefully because there is a person who is sitting down who is about to stand up. We've considered the occasion.

Consider secondly with me the ***proclamation*** 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 let him who believes in me.* Drink. As the Scripture has said, *out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.* Now, I want you to notice two things. First, to the one who is thirsty. Jesus gives a call, a command. *Let the thirsty one come to me.* He's speaking a word to rescue you from the downward spirals and the deceptive saviors. Let the one who believes in me drink. He's speaking a word to refresh you. How do we come? Not with feet, but with living faith.

This time, 13 years ago, our family knew that my father was dying of pancreatic cancer. And in the last week of his life, he gave me a beautiful picture of what it means to believe in Jesus. With each passing day, he grew more and more thirsty. But there was nothing he could do. He longed for a cold sip of water, and he became so weak that I had to hold up the glass to his lips. And all that remained for him to do was to drink and receive.

That's what Jesus means by ***coming and believing***. Perhaps you're here this morning for the first time, and in 2024 you want to explore Christianity. Good for you. God loves the honest seeking. And I want you to notice how radically different this is from anything else you have ever heard. The solution to our sufferings and sins - the solution to our woes and our wanderings is a relational transaction.

Jesus calls us not to turn inward on ourselves, but to turn upward and outward to him. First, you listen to this person who speaks to you, and then you open your heart to this person who has spoken to you. If you could climb into living faith, you would hear words like this. Jesus, I need you. You can help me. I've been watching. I've been listening. And so, I come to you and I lift up my thirsty soul to you. Into your

hands. I commit my spirit. Simple, humble, honest, Christ-Focused faith. You're not working for a wage. You're simply trusting to receive a gift. The real you engaging the real God in the midst of the really hard in order that you might receive real help. That's the first thing that I want you to notice. Jesus issues a command.

But the second thing that I want you to notice is that to the one who is thirsty, Jesus makes a promise. As the Scripture has said, *out of his heart will flow rivers of living water*. Now, here's the interpretive question behind the alternate translation. In the English standard version out of whose heart will these rivers flow? The Greek text actually allows for two possible translations. Some take his heart to refer to the believer. The person who comes to Jesus and drinks from Jesus by believing in Jesus... like the woman at the well in John 4. But Jesus is grounding his promise. Did you notice in the Old Testament Scriptures and the Old Testament Scriptures never refer to the believer as the source of living water. But what is more, in John's gospel, we find this recurring pattern. Jesus comes to fulfill and replace the Old Testament symbols. For example, in 1 Kings 6, King Solomon builds the temple as God's dwelling place in Jerusalem. But in John 1, God became flesh and dwelt among us. That is to say, Jesus is God's true and final temple. In Numbers 21, Moses made a bronze snake and he put it up on a pole and everyone who was snake bitten and looked to it in faith would live. But in John 3, Jesus comes and says, I must be lifted up on the cross, that everyone who believes in me shall live.

In Exodus 16, God sent manna from heaven to feed the Israelites. But in John 6, Jesus comes and says, *I am the living bread that came down from heaven. And if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever*. Do you see? In the same way Jesus comes to fulfill and replace the Old Testament symbols here, watch closely, on the last day, the great day of the Feast, in the midst of all of this drama, Jesus stands up and cries out saying, *I am the fulfillment of all that this festival commemorates and all that this feast anticipates. Every year you look for waters of salvation. But every year, these earthly waters run dry. Today is the day that you've been waiting for. I am the better rock of Moses. I am the final temple of God from my heart will flow to your heart. Rivers of living water. So if anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and let him who believes in me. Drink*.

Is our church not thirsty? Thirsty because of the relentless hardships that wear us down. I'm learning the rush hour traffic on Highway 280. Oh my! The culture that keeps pressing against you. The injustices that keep thriving. The newborn who will not sleep through the night. New parents. The teenager who will not take no for an answer. And then you get to be my age and the adult children come home even more. The house, the car, the body, the golf swing all get old and break down. And it wears us down, doesn't it? It's the problem of suffering.

But remember, there's also the problem, the deepest problem of sin. Thirsty because deceitful cravings trip us up and trap us. The craving for approval. So we live to please other people to get it. The craving for control. And so we get anxious. If we fear, we'll lose it. The craving for my will to be done. So we fight. If we don't get it. The craving for that feel good whenever we feel bad. So we get hooked on it. Are you thirsty? Where will we go to quench your thirst? The world can only offer partial relief. But Jesus gives water that truly sustains sufferers and transforms sinners because this water will revive your soul.

We've considered the **occasion**. We've considered the **proclamation**. Consider, finally, the **interpretation** of the Apostle John. Now this, he said about the spirit whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus was not yet glorified. Again, I want you to notice two things. First of all, the gift of living water is the spirit of the living God. And John 14, just a few

chapters later, Jesus says, *I will ask the Father and He will give you another helper to be with you forever.* Even the spirit of truth now, behind this statement stands a very rich history of the Person of the Holy Spirit. The great theologian and Puritan John Owen once said that to appreciate the Spirit ministry in your life, you must first appreciate the Spirit's ministry in the life of Jesus. He once remarked that the Holy Spirit was the intimate companion of Jesus. Remember the story as Jesus grew. The Spirit filled him with wisdom. At the baptism The Spirit assured Jesus of His Sonship. in the time of temptation the Spirit equipped Jesus for battle in his darkest moments. The Spirit sustained Jesus in His suffering and from the grave the Spirit raised Jesus to an end destructible life. Do you see it? Jesus gives the same spirit to you to be your intimate companion, to fill you, and to grow you with wisdom, to assure you of your Sonship, to equip you for spiritual battle and ministry, to sustain you in your darkest hour, even unto death. To raise you to an indestructible life.

Do you see it is not to your disadvantage that Jesus returns to the Father. Rather, it is to your strong advantage. Sinclair Ferguson once remarked that Jesus is the one who first bore the Spirit, and now Jesus is for you the one who now bestows the spirit. So, in the Spirit you have everything you need as you move into 2024.

That's the first thing that I want you to notice. But the second thing is this the way this gift of the Spirit comes to us is through the way that Jesus was glorified. How so? Well, from one perspective, Jesus was glorified on Sunday when God raised him from the dead. On Sunday, he was vindicated as the righteous one. On Sunday He was found and embraced by the father. On Sunday, he was free to walk in newness of life. On Sunday, his body was raised in power and glory.

But from John's perspective, throughout his Gospel, Jesus is seen to be especially glorious on Friday, when he was lifted up on the cross. It was on Friday that he was condemned as if he were the guilty one. It was on Friday that he was lost and forsaken by the father. It was on Friday that he came under the powers of sin and death. It was on Friday that his body was sewn in weakness and shame. Do you see the glory of Jesus revealed on Friday? He's trading places with you.

Recall the scene. Exodus 17.

The Israelites were traveling through the wilderness, grumbling against Moses and against God. And God commands Moses. I want you to take the rod of judgment, that same staff with which you struck the Nile. I don't want you to strike the people. I want you to walk in front of the people. Don't strike the people. Strike the rock and so Moses did and out from the rock, gushed waters. And the people lived as they drank. Do you see? Jesus is the true rock of Moses. Hear the good news. He receives on Friday God's wrath of judgment. The people grumbled against God testing him, saying, Is the Lord for us or not? Is the Lord not for you?

Take a long look at the one who was lifted up for you on Friday. Survey the wondrous cross. See Jesus glorified as the Lord who is with you and the Lord who is for you. Look at him trading places. He says. I thirst on the cross. He comes into your desert and comes under God's curse. And because Jesus has come under God's curse, we come under God's blessing. For all who believe from the death of Jesus comes the life of Jesus. To all who would believe in the Lord Jesus.

Is our city not thirsty? Drive down the street, turn into your neighborhood. Walk down the rows of houses. And I promise you, behind every door is a story. Walk into the office. Walk into the classroom.

Walk into your favorite restaurant. Into the stadium. Into the emergency room. I promise you. Behind every face is a moral drama. Deep down, the men, women and children of Birmingham are thirsty, embattled by suffering and entangled by their sins. And what will we do as a church in 2024? We will excel still more staying On mission, On message and In ministry. We will proclaim and we will counsel the Christ who gives rivers of living water to all who would believe.

I'll close with this. In the New Year, you will find yourself living in the wilderness. Even this week, you will find yourself thirsty. But take heart. In the New year, you can drink and you can work out the grace that writes: *Blessed is the man who trust in the Lord whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water that sends out its roots by the stream and does not fear when he comes. For its leaves remain green and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.* Why? Because Jesus has lived. Jesus has been judged. Jesus has been raised. And now Jesus sits enthroned and has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit. And He pours out rivers of living water to everyone who would believe. He says to you this last day of 2023, *If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and let the one who believes in me drink.*

As the Scriptures says, *out of his heart will flow to your heart rivers of living water.* So let's come to him. Let's drink from him. Let's live by him.

Let me pray for us. Father, I pray that according to the riches of your glory, you would strengthen your people with power through your spirit, so that Christ might dwell in their hearts through faith that each one here would be rooted and grounded and know the love of Christ.

Height, the depth, the links, the breadth. Would you strengthen them by the Spirit? I pray in the New Year to come. In Jesus name, Amen.