

Pentecost 2020

An all age talk and an adult sermon

Acts 2:1-21 and John 7:37-39

John 7:37-39 On the last day of the feast, the greatest day,¹⁰¹ Jesus stood up and shouted out, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me, and **7:38** let the one who believes in me drink. Just as the scripture says, '***From within him will flow rivers of living water.***'" **7:39** (Now he said this about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were going to receive, for the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.)

All Age Talk

Imagine a baby being born. What do we all wait for? That first cry! The first breath of the baby is important. That intake of oxygen – the first use of the lungs – vital. Anything wrong and the midwife does all she can to clear any blockages in the throat and make the baby take its first breath. Once the first breath has been taken, there's a sigh of relief in the room. It's going to live.... and the baby will indeed, carry on breathing.

Birthdays are remembered, not just to count the years of living, but in a way to give thanks for the birth in the first place. The day we entered the world and began to make an impact.

Today is sometimes called the church's birthday. The day the group of Jesus' disciples took their first breath as the church. The day of Pentecost.

Pentecost is 50 days after Easter. It was, and still is, a Jewish festival. Remember that Jesus and his first followers were all Jews

That day of Pentecost was the first breath of the church - the cry of life.....in a multitude of languages giving the message that Jesus Christ is the one they had been waiting for AND that his message of God's love was to spread throughout the whole world.

The church is us – you and me – the people who follow Jesus. The church often meets in a building, which is also called a church.

In Jesus' day people met together to worship God in the Temple. But the bible says that we are now the temple.... the place where God can be found.

I've done a picture in my prayer and art journal of a church - us – the body of Jesus Christ from which a river flows.

You may wonder why I've put a river coming from the church. That's because of something that Jesus said. He was at a feast of Pentecost, which was a bit like a harvest festival when the first fruits had been gathered in..... not like ours at the end of the harvest.

It was a festival that lasted a few days. And :

On the last day of the feast, the greatest day, Jesus stood up and shouted out, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. Just as the scripture says, ***'From within him will flow rivers of living water.'***" (John 7:37-39)

Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit. He used the image of flowing water which might seem a bit strange to us, but the people listening to him would have understood as it would have reminded them of many passages in their scriptures.

There were many prophecies about a future time when God would put right all that's wrong in the world.

The bible is a bit like a jigsaw puzzle.... lots of different pieces that don't make much sense on their own but when put together in the right way give a lovely picture. A bit like a giant jigsaw made up of smaller pictures. there are lots of different images and pictures in the bible, lots of different stories, which together make up the big picture or story.

The temple and river from OT prophecy has become a reality in us, the church. And that message continues through us.

From the body of Christ, the living temple ... flows water of life.

This is picture language – a metaphor for life that's good and full of love and justice and peace.

The water of life is another image for the Holy Spirit working in and through us.

First a trickle then a stream until a steep river flows through the land. With life giving water for all who come and drink . It is freely given to all who wish to receive healing, reconciliation and peace.

My picture has trees lining the river - symbolic of another image in the book of Revelation where there are trees with leaves for healing of the nations. There are other Old Testament references to the people becoming like oaks or other trees.... roots go down deep.

The land is watered and what was parched and dry becomes lush and green, teeming with life. the Holy Spirit is the life breath of the church. The Holy Spirit flows in and through us - from the source, Jesus.... out to anyone who we come in contact with.

As Isaiah says - Ho.... come and drink, the water of life. It is freely given - no charge but at great cost... the cross.

We are invited this Sunday especially, but actually every day, to come and drink of the living water, the Holy Spirit: freely given by Jesus.

We can imagine, just as if we were drinking a glass of water when thirsty, that if we are feeling spiritually dry and in need of more of God's peace, drinking more of the Holy Spirit.

Each day we need water – each and every day we need to keep on breathing. Each day we get up and get dressed. And each day we need to pray for the Holy Spirit to help us to love and serve others. So we are going to sing last week's song again – put your God suit on.

10.30am Sermon

The best drink of the day for me is that first cup of tea in the morning, followed by a second cup during my prayer time. It refreshes and wakes me up.

Water is also refreshing on a hot day. Are you having your 8 glasses of water each day? Along with your 5 a day fruit and veg?

Water is good for us – without it we get dehydrated. But quite often many of us confuse the signals for thirst with those for hunger and end up eating something instead of what we really need, drinking some water. !

If we eat rather than drink we shouldn't be surprised when we put on weight because often we don't turn to the fruit or veg but to sweet or fatty things.... food that satisfies the craving in the short term but as we all know it doesn't REALLY satisfy.

If that is true of physical thirst and hunger – then it is also true of spiritual appetites and needs. Water is often used as a symbol for spiritual sustenance.

In today's gospel Jesus invites all who are thirsty to come to him. It's only a short extract but nevertheless there's quite a lot of significance in it.

The Setting - They were at the Temple in Jerusalem at the end of the 8-day festival of booths (or Tabernacles). Jesus had waited until half way through the festival before he said anything. He did a fair bit of teaching that got the backs up of the religious elite and they were plotting to kill him.

One of the rituals during the festival, along with daily sacrifices, was the priests would pour out water and wine around the altar and there were prayers for Rain and the Resurrection of the Dead: one essential for life in the here and now, one concerned with life after death.

Therefore, when Jesus began to speak about living water, on that last day of the festival, the audience would understand that Jesus was talking about new life.

Rivers of Living Water – When Jesus said “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me”, the people who knew their scriptures would have also called to mind an invitation God gave through the prophet Isaiah:

55 Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.

² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labour for that which does not satisfy?

So Jesus is putting himself in God's place. Isaiah was issuing an invitation from God to his people. Now Jesus is saying people should come to him. He also refers to the scriptures that say, “out of a believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.”

The heart = the deepest part of our personality and being. The Greek actually said out of his belly or gut. The Holy Spirit reaches the parts of us nothing else can.

Jesus' audience would have thought of the wonderful vision that Ezekiel had of the Temple when God would renew and revive the nation (Ezekiel 47). He saw water flowing out through the threshold and as it went further from the temple, it got deeper and deeper, until it was a river so deep you could swim in it and it couldn't be crossed.

He was told that stagnant waters will become fresh and wherever the river goes, every living creature will live.

There were trees on the bank of the river growing all sorts of fresh fruit each month and the leaves are for healing.

This is remarkably like the vision that John had of the renewed earth where God makes all things new.

"...the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." (Revelation 22:1-2)

I'm sure you noticed that both prophecies referred to leaves for healing and it isn't just for Israel.

The Jews in Jesus' day believed that many of the promises of God would be fulfilled in their lifetime. That's why there were so many claiming to be the Messiah.

So when the day of Pentecost came, 50 days after Jesus' resurrection, the crowds who heard Peter's speech, would have heard his reference to the prophet Joel within the context of that expectation of God's revival and renewal of the earth.

Jesus, who was born as a human being, lived our life, died for our sins, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, now sent his *Spirit to his people to make them his body and to work out in them what he had won for them.*

Pentecost was the inauguration of the new era of the Spirit. Although The Spirit coming was a unique and unrepeatable historical event, **all** the people of God can now always and everywhere benefit from his ministry. The Holy Spirit is poured out on everyone, young and old, male and female.

In the Old Testament God gave the spirit to particular people for particular tasks. Now, in the days of the New Testament, which didn't stop at the covers of the bible but continues in and through us, the Holy Spirit is given to ALL believers to enable us to continue Jesus' work in the world.

Without the Holy Spirit, Christian discipleship would be impossible – like driving a car without petrol, you could push it, but why push when you can sit in the driving seat and let the engine do the work?

- There can be no life without the life-giver,
- no understanding without the Spirit of truth,
- no fellowship without the unity of the spirit,
- no Christ-likeness of character apart from his fruit and
- no effective witness without his power.

As a body without breath is a corpse, so the church without the Spirit is dead.

Do you feel spiritually dead, or perhaps a little dehydrated?

Do you want to live the Christian life more the way you should?

Then come to Jesus who gives the water of life and drink.

And when you do and you become spiritually refreshed, continue to drink, to come to Jesus and ask for the water of life, so it overflows.

We are the Body of Christ, living stones in the Temple of God, the people through whom the world can know God's love.

So let's pray that we overflow with the healing power of God's love – healing relationships, communities and lives.

And let's pray for not just a trickle nor a stream but a river flowing out into our villages, into the spiritually dry places and people who need to know and experience God's love and the new life he offers.

Please consider joining the Zoom meetings I spoke about in the notices – if you missed the beginning of the service I'll repeat at the end.

come.... all who are thirsty...come and drink and be satisfied.

Rev'd Liz Jones

31st May 2020