**John 7:37-39.**

37 On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me,38and let the one who believes in me drink. Asthe scripture has said, “Out of his heartshall flow rivers of living water.” ’39Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

**There Is a River Flowing at Bethel**

Picture the scene: The Festival of Booths at the Temple in Jerusalem about two thousand years ago. The festival commemorates the miracle in which God caused water to flow from the Rock of Horeb, thus enabling the Israelites to continue their journey through the wilderness and into Canaan.

The Exodus story, the story of God calling Moses and leading the Hebrews through the desert into the promised land is the foundation of Jewish identity, and the Festival of Booths was a jubilant celebration of a major event along that journey. Every year, thousands of people would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for this eight-day festival. Every day of the festival, a priest brought forth, in a golden vessel, water drawn from the Stream of Siloam, which flowed under the temple-mountain. He solemnly poured this water upon the altar. Then the words of Isaiah 12:3 were sung: “*With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of Salvation!”*

Now imagine, on the last and most jubilant day of this celebration Jesus stands (which means he likely moved from the back pew up to a higher place, on a step, so everyone could see him) and shouts, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink.” Here he goes again: Jesus making a scene in front of thousands, and during a sacred ceremony. Jesus was already the talk of the town with news of all the miracles, healings, and teachings. The people expected him to show up at this important celebration, but when a few days passed at the festival and no one saw Jesus people began to wonder, “Where is he?”

Jesus had a bad rapport with the priests – early in the festival they had sent the church police out to arrest him, perhaps in the hope of avoiding a scene like the one that was occurring right now, at the finale of the celebration. Now at this high point in the festival, Jesus gets into the spotlight.

“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink.” The Hebrew and Greek words for *water* appear over six hundred times in the Bible. Thirst was a common and frightening experience to people who lived in dry climates. Not many of us have experienced severe dehydration, but draught and thirst were no strangers to the Jews. Yet there’s more than one kind of thirst, and Jesus is here talking about a Spiritual thirst. Not the physical discomfort and pain that comes from lack of water, but a spiritual pain, a thirst that can lead to even greater despair and discomfort. You may recall the conversation Jesus had with the woman from Samaria at the well of Jacob (John 4), when he informed her that he could supply her with a living water that would make her never thirst again. There he informed the woman of a living water that he could supply; here, at the Festival of Booths, Jesus goes beyond simply informing the people that he is the source of such living water; here he *invites* the people to come to him. Such an invitation infuriated the priests who considered Jesus not only a threat to their own established religion but also considered Jesus a blasphemer. The prophet Jeremiah (17:13) had referred to God himself as “the spring of living water.” To the priests, it was bad enough that Jesus equated himself with God, but to invite others to believe in him threatened their own position as religious authorities.

Yet Jesus is ever in sync with God’s own character, and the “living water” that Jesus promises will be freely given to us and will flow as a mighty river from all who believe in Christ. Today we celebrate Pentecost, the Church’s birthday. It was the day that the Holy Spirit descended upon a little band of disciples gathered in a small room in Jerusalem, empowering them to speak the Gospel in languages they had never before spoken. The Spirit came like a rushing wind, or a rushing river, driving the disciples into the streets of Jerusalem to continue the ministry that Jesus began, to declare the forgiveness of sins and to build the Kingdom of God just as Jesus had done. On Pentecost, over three thousand people came to believe in Jesus Christ.

That torrential river of living water flows from you and me even today! History has witnessed this kind of outpouring of the Holy Spirit from time to time. John Wesley, our benefactor, preached the Gospel to thousands of people who became gave their lives to Jesus Christ. The Pentecostal Church is one of the fastest growing churches in America. God is moving in people’s hearts, drawing them to drink from His infinite love and grace.

These spiritual movements don’t only occur on a grand scale. I believe that there is a “little Pentecost” occurring in Bethel Church today! In the past few weeks I have heard testimony from members who once again feel a strong drive to minister. Ideas are sprouting up that envision an even-more active church that engages the community and addresses the needs of its members. The leadership training meeting that was held a few weeks ago generated more enthusiasm and action than any of the participants had anticipated, and we left the meeting with our heads spinning. The Holy Spirit both rested upon us like tongues of fire and flowed from us like streams of living water!

And because the inspiration for our ministry at Bethel comes from the Holy Spirit, our objective is none other than bringing glory to God. The love of the Father that directed Jesus’ life directs ours as well. Whether we’re feeding the hungry or bowling together, we do all to the glory of God whose desire is that we bring joy to others as we joyfully celebrate our lives.

We must remember nonetheless that joyful lives are not always trouble-free lives. The disciples who were driven out of their small room to minister to a spiritually thirsty world on Pentecost were led into a life for risks and (often) failures. It would have been much easier for any of them to return to their old, less hazardous professions and let the days go by with relative calm. But the abundant life that Christ promises us is a life that includes danger and great challenges. The disciples would not always experience success in their missions, and nearly all of them would end their lives as martyrs. But if we could ever ask them if they had any regrets for the path they chose, I suspect they have none. All of them had tasted the living water, and all of them knew that life it gave them was both abundant *and* eternal.

Let us pray that God would bless the present and future ministries of Bethel by filling each of us with Living Water, that the Holy Spirit would lead us as it did Jesus, and as it did many of his disciples throughout the ages, and that God would be glorified and his Kingdom be established by our hands and our words, and our good deeds, to the glory of God the Father, in Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.