

My best friend growing up and I spent a ton of time walking the rails near my hometown in the summer. Rarely were there ever trains. It was just something to do over the summer break. I'd always carry a jug of water, pellet gun and a bowie knife as my dog Dixie explored the fields to the left and right of the tracks. We'd walk out till half the water was gone, then head back home. By the time we got back we were good and hot. A quick cool off with the hose water over the head was almost always necessary. Sometimes we'd take a dip in the pond just outside of town if it was really hot. Thirst was the biggest concern on those walks.

(pause) /

Thirst is our body's low-level water indicator. In fact, if you feel thirsty then your body is already dehydrated, and you need to get some water in your system. Dehydration causes headaches, dizziness, and decreased blood pressure and if nothing is done it leads to death. We are made up of about 75% water and we need water for our bodies to function. The more we are hydrated the better our bodies works. (1) /

As it happens, our souls also have a low-level indicator. Our souls need spiritual water, the kind of water that Jesus is talking about in the gospel of John this morning. When we fail to receive this living water then our spirits show signs of dehydration. We can feel depressed, angry, bitter, full of resentment. These are all signs of spiritual thirst. /

Jesus knows of our need of spiritual water. Our scripture reading this morning has Jesus at the last and greatest day of Festival of the Tabernacles. This event celebrated the miracles that the Hebrews experienced in their 40 years in the wilderness; including God bringing forth water from the rock. So, the priests would bring large basins of water to commemorate that miracle. /

Jesus, in the middle of a big party, with thousands of people around stood up and shouted, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink.” The scripture also says, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” Now this was a festival, a party, most people I imagine were drinking wine, some were drinking water, but I would be willing to bet that very few of them were thirsty, physically. However, Jesus could see through the (2)

physical and into the spiritual. He saw a deep thirst of another kind.

(pause) /

Imagine for a moment, the creation of man, Day 6. God formed man out of the dust and breathed life into his nostrils. God did something else too. God gave humankind a need, a thirst, for God. God also gave us freewill. God did not preprogram us to worship God specifically. /

Why? I'm glad you asked! I think it is because God did not want humans to be robots with no choice but to worship God. Rather, God wanted us to choose God of our own freewill. It's sort of like the love we have for our significant others, we choose to love each other instead of anyone else. God wants us to choose to love God. That's one of the greatest feelings in the world, to know that people love you because they want to, not because they have to. (pause) /

We have a void in our lives that is only filled by God. We try to fill it with other things, like money and stuff, some fill it with drug and alcohol use, some fill it with sexual improprieties, and others fill it by dominating and oppressing their fellow human beings. These things (3)

fill the void for a moment, but the feeling does not last for very long.

This is because these things are not what God wants for us. God wants to fill the void with the living water of the Holy Spirit. /

The phrase “living water” is unique. Jesus is referring to the Holy Spirit which would come on the Day of Pentecost. I want you to picture two different scenes. Close your eyes if you need to. The first scene is a stream flowing to a lake. The stream is surrounded by trees and flowers. You look down at the water and you see clear down to the rocks at the bottom. You reach down and touch the water and it is cool and clean to the touch. You scoop some out of the stream and put it to your lips and it tastes good. Better than anything you get from a bottle. You see small fish swimming in the water, and you have no problem dipping your toes in the cool, clean stream. /

Now I want you to think of another scene. This one is outside a factory. The water comes from a drainage pipe from inside the factory and the water collects in a pond outside. It is scummy with green and yellow sludge. It stinks so bad you cannot get close to it and even if you did you wouldn't want to reach down to have a drink. There are no (4)

fish swimming in the water, in fact there is no life at all, only a putrid, nasty pool. /

Which one of the two would you rather have? Which one is living water? Which one does God desire for us? The Spirit of God is a living spirit that dwells within us and helps us in every aspect of our lives.

Jesus said “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” (pause) /

Jesus is saying, Come to me and drink. There is the answer. He will give you the Spirit which will flow out of your heart. It will reach every aspect of your life. Some of us here feel as if our heart is too dry. Here’s the thing, though. There isn’t anything Jesus hasn’t seen. He is understanding, forgiving, and filled with grace enough for all. His water is good, fresh water. His water heals and purifies. His water strengthens and renews. This is the living water of the Holy Spirit. (pause) /

Water has a unique property. It will conform to any space it is put in. A glass, a fishbowl, a pond, or even the ocean. It also goes wherever it is needed. When we drink water, we don’t have to tell the water (5)

which part of the body it needs to go into. The water goes where it's needed. So it is with the Spirit through Jesus Christ. Need help in your marriage, there goes the Spirit. Need anger management, the Spirit helps. Do you have addictions that affect your whole family, the living water moves there as well. (pause) /

The two scripture lessons today show two different symbols for the Holy Spirit. One is water and the other is fire. I think God chose these symbols because they were something everyone is familiar with. Also, because anything that is touched by water, like in a flood, or in a fire is never the same. So it is with the Holy Spirit. When we are touched by the Holy Spirit we are never the same. We cannot help but to be different. Paul tells us that those who are in Christ are new creations because the old is removed by the grace of God. We are purified by the power of God's living water. We are strengthened by God's living water. (pause) /

Remember the words of Jesus, ““Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.”” We do not have to go to a well to fetch this water it comes from within each of us because it is the grace of God

dwelling within each of us. Living water is God's grace that is abundant for all people, and it is with us even before we know that it's there.

(pause) /

//// There is a story about a small fish in a river. He was swimming around minding his own business when he happened to stop by a group of humans standing by the riverside. It was a class taking a field trip. The little fish listened to the teacher speak. He heard the teacher say that water is one of the most important elements on earth. Without it, life could not exist and every creature on earth would die. Well, this disturbed the young fish, and he went frantically looking for some water. He knew he had to have some of this stuff, or he would die.

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He went to a group of young fish playing and asked them if they knew where he could find some water. The young fish mocked him and told him to go away, he was ruining their fun. So, the little fish went swimming down the stream and came upon an older, wiser fish. He asked the old fish where he could find some water. The old fish (7)

looked and laughed at the scared little fish and said, “You are swimming in water, it is all around you.” /

We have a tendency to ask where God is. When there is a tragedy, we often wonder where God is. Sometimes we get so deep in ourselves that we think that God gave up on us long ago. This is not the case. God’s living water is always around us and within us. We come thirsty to God and God tells us to drink in deeply. Jesus tells us to take in all that we can and more because our cup truly overflows with God’s grace and love. Thanks be to God. Amen. /////