

May 28, 2023 – John 7:37-39

Watching someone you love suffer is horrible. It's heart-wrenching. Emi is a pretty healthy kid, but she does get sick occasionally. She does injure herself every once in a while. And seeing her sick or in pain makes me just about as miserable as it makes her. I want to help her, but often there is nothing I can do.

Even more devastating, though, is when someone we love is suffering because of their own choices. Because of their own lifestyle. Because of their own behaviors. Because they are doing something completely self-destructive, but they won't stop. Sometimes they know the behavior is going to hurt them. Sometimes they refuse to admit it. Either way, all we can do is pray for them and hope that they stop before it's too late.

I have to think Jesus felt this way almost constantly during his earthly ministry. Looking at humanity and our self-destructive behaviors. Looking at his people and our terrible choices. Looking at his children as we are consumed by sin that rots away at our very souls.

Our Gospel lesson today is one of those moments of pain, I think. The feast that John refers to in this passage is the Feast of Tabernacles. You might remember that I talked a bit about this festival during our Lenten series a few months ago.

The Feast of Tabernacles was an eight-day commemoration and celebration of God's merciful provision to the people of Israel after the Exodus, as they lived in the wilderness before entering the Promised Land. It's called the Feast of Tabernacles because that's how they lived for over 40 years. In tabernacles... tents. Temporary shelters, awaiting a permanent home. Worshipping at a great Tabernacle, awaiting a permanent Temple.

And during this time of wandering, God provided for his people. And the very first thing he provides for them after they set out is water. As the children of Israel and their livestock suffered from thirst, God commanded Moses to strike a rock in the middle of the desert, and water miraculously gushed out. From the moment they left Egypt, God wanted the Israelites to know that he would always provide for his people. They had no reason to doubt him.

And before they had even set one foot in the Promised Land, God commanded they to gather together to commemorate his abundant provision. His abundant provision for their physical thirst and their physical hunger, and for every other need that they would have, of body or soul. For more than a thousand years, God's people gathered together every year to celebrate this. Remembering how he had always provided for them. And praying that he would continue to provide for them.

It's not surprising, then, that the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles would eventually become connected to the coming of the Messiah. Through the prophets, God had promised to send his servant, his anointed one, who would meet all their needs. Who would provide for them like Moses had once provided for them in the wilderness. Who would lead them into a new Promised Land, flowing with milk and honey.

So here are all these thousands of people, gathered in Jerusalem. Fervently praying that God would send his Messiah to save them. And here is Jesus, that very Messiah, standing in the midst of them. And they are oblivious to who he is.

For two and a half years, he has been preaching and calling people to repent because God's kingdom is at hand. He has performed miracle after miracle as signs for the people to see that he is, indeed, the promised Savior. He has openly stated that he is the fulfillment of Scripture's prophecy. That he was sent by the Father to redeem the world from sin. But they still don't believe.

In fact, a great many of them openly reject him. The Pharisees, the Sadducees, the chief priests, the Sanhedrin. Even his own family. John notes in this same chapter that Jesus' own brothers did not believe in him.

Surrounded by his own people, as they loudly celebrate God's provision and pray for the Messiah, Jesus stands up and cries out over the din of voices and music, *"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.'"*

He hasn't given up on them. He won't give up on them. No matter how much it hurts him to watch his people hurt themselves. The Israelites drank from a rock and survived the wilderness of Sinai. Anyone who hears Jesus' voice can drink from him and survive the wilderness of this sinful world. He is the source of God's provision. He is the source of salvation. He is the true water of life.

And then John adds this interesting note. He says that Jesus said these things *"about the Spirit, whom those who believe in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified."* Not yet. There's more to this story.

You see, before God's people could drink from the spiritual rock that is Christ, Jesus would have to celebrate one more feast. The Feast of Passover. Which would be just a short 6 months later. And it would be the last feast that Jesus would attend in his earthly ministry.

And by the end of that Passover, Jesus would take on a new role. He would be the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. He would be the spotless sacrifice, without sin or blemish, killed for our salvation. He would become the one whose blood causes the destroyer to pass over us. He would free us from captivity and slavery to sin, death, and the devil by dying on a cross.

Think about it: The One who is the source of living water suffered such thirst, was so dehydrated during the whole ordeal on our behalf, that his tongue stuck to his jaw and he begged for just a drop of water on a sponge. As the Fountain of Life died on the cross and a soldier pierced his side, blood and water flowed out of his lifeless body. Blood to cover sin and water to give life to all who would believe that he is the Savior of the world.

At the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus pointed forward to the salvation he would accomplish at the Feast of Passover. But it's not until a third festival arrives that the people of Jerusalem discover the gift they have been given. The Festival of Pentecost.

After offering living water to people who would not believe in him. After dying on a cross at the hands of people who rejected his salvation for them. At this festival, Jesus gives his Holy Spirit to his disciples. And finally, the people of Jerusalem repent. Finally, they drink from him. They believe his Gospel. And they receive him through the promises of his Word and through baptism into his name.

Each Sunday is for us a Feast of Tabernacles, where we are offered living water. Each Sunday is for us a Feast of Passover, where the Body and Blood of God's spotless Lamb takes away the sin of the world. And each Sunday is for us a Feast of Pentecost. Where we receive the Holy Spirit as we hear, in a language we can understand, the Good News of Jesus as the living water, who satisfies your spiritual thirst.

Satisfies you and gives you a river of living water that flows from your own heart. A river that flows to all those around you. All those who, like you, are thirsty for God's provision. All those who feel like they are living in a wilderness without water and need to hear that there is a God who loves them. Who cares for them. Who has not abandoned them. And who will bring them into his Promised Land.

Jesus looked at the people around him and saw a world dying from its own sinful behaviors. By the work of the Holy Spirit, he gives us those same eyes. To look around us and see a world dying in its sinful lifestyles and sinful choices.

They are thirsty. And you have water to give them. Living water, such that they will never be thirsty again. Amen.