

John 7:37-39
Pentecost
May 31, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, Jesus cries, “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” (Then John comments), “Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Have you ever noticed that Pentecost seems to be the one Sunday each year in which the content of the Gospel Reading does *not* seem to be the main focus? It seems, doesn't it, that the main focus for today is the *Second* Reading, and that the Gospel simply gives some foreshadowing insight into the events of the Second Reading. And that's actually not an incorrect understanding (in a sense) because it's a reminder that the Gospel continues ... not in the sense that it is ever-evolving and the work of the Messiah is not yet complete – but in the sense that the Gospel doesn't stop with Jesus ascending into heaven, then leaving us to our own devices. The Gospel “continues” in the sense that what was promised and achieved in the Gospel record is now poured out and bestowed upon the Church through a Word and proclamation that is “ever-living”... as the Holy Spirit divinely inspires the Word to be described “living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword.” That is to say, the Gospel *is* the history of what Christ has achieved and accomplished

for His Church... it's what (as St Luke begins the Book of Acts) "Jesus *began* to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen." And what were those commands: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you," Jesus says to the apostles, "and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." In other words, it's as if Jesus says, "All that you saw me do is not only for you benefit, but the Gospel is for the benefit for all who are far off." For those dead in their trespasses and sins, the Word is living and active, so that history's accomplishments by the Christ for the sake of the new covenant are then poured out upon and applied to Christ's Church.

And what is that gospel poured out upon His Church? Many have rallied around this day of Pentecost as a day of breaking out from oppressive state mandates, a way of marking "new birth" of the Church, in the same way that the Church was once visually "born" on that original Pentecost. Though we may agree with the sentiment that the Word ought have free course and not be bound by government, we must be careful to keep in perspective what the original day of Pentecost was all about. It wasn't about pouring out first amendment freedoms to preach the gospel, nor was it a rallying cry against government oppression (though, true, as an example for us, quite quickly the apostles steadfastly and joyfully endured

jailtime, penalties, and public disdain rather than give up preaching Christ).

In truth, though, the first Pentecost was not about the rising up *of* the Church, but about the divine outpouring of care *for* the Church. It was about the gift of the Spirit through baptism and the preaching of the Word... and with the gift of the Spirit, the enkindled faith of eternal life that rejoiced in the news that God's appointed Christ had finished his course, the Messianic mission was complete, and the "new birth" of the last times – that new birth offered to all, "Repent and be baptized... this gift is for you and your children" – that new birth and the resulting baptismal life of the Church with faith in God and fervent love toward one another was now to be lived out with confidence in Christ, the Redeemer and great High Priest, ascended on high.

Thus, we may say that the day of Pentecost was not the pouring out of the Law alone, nor of the Gospel alone, but the pouring out of the Spirit of Truth who would lead us into all truth – baptizing all nations and teaching them all things whatsoever – both law and gospel – that Christ had given His Church. Certainly, Peter's sermon that day was not an example of only the Gospel being preached to the nations (for it focused on their role in crucifying the Lord of glory), nor only a preaching of the Law, (for it offered Baptism, forgiveness, and life)... but it was a preaching of the full counsel of God in power and truth... the full counsel of God that

preaches to us in our situations in life and impacts and informs and teaches every station of life... and, having called to repentance our misuse and failure in and abuse of every station of life, then brings us to Jesus (that very Jesus that took on our sins) and – with this Jesus (whom we crucified and who God raised from the dead and made both Lord and Christ) – so also are we brought to the forgiveness of sins, life, salvation... that we may be kept with Jesus Christ in the safety of the one true faith. So then, this Pentecost, we rejoice that the Gospel is poured out upon all of us who, St Peter says, were far off and were brought back to our gracious God, who is ours anew in Christ Jesus.

And that same Christ, therefore knows and spells out for us what that gift of the Holy Spirit does for us. And, therefore, it's Christ's own explanation, (and not the historical account of Acts 2) that is our text for this festival of Pentecost: "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.' [Then St John explains,] "He said this about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive."

Now, before we explain Law and Gospel, allow me to explain one matter of interpretation that may impact your understanding of this text. Our English translates this passage, "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 waters.'" And that

English makes it sound very much like the living waters will flow out of the heart of the believer. But, in the Greek, it could just as readily be translated, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me, and whoever believes in me, let him drink. As the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living waters.’” Notice, how that interpretation sounds like the living waters are flowing from the heart of Jesus, by whom we assuage our spiritual thirst.

So, which interpretation is right? In a sense, they both are. The Holy Spirit comes from Christ, as Jesus himself says, “If I go, I will send the Helper to you. When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.” And, as we said last week, to refer to the Spirit of truth is really to call him “the Spirit from Christ,” for Christ is the way, *the Truth*, and the life. So, it’s consistent with the Scriptures to say that out of Jesus’ heart will flow rivers of living water, as He gives us His Holy Spirit... especially as the living water of Baptism is first poured out upon the Church on the day of Pentecost.

But, as our life and salvation come from Jesus, it also is consistent to say that “Out of [the believer’s heart] will flow rivers of living water.” That *is* consistent because those who by baptism passively receive Christ, life, and salvation, then actively in baptismal faith live according to Christ, life, and salvation... with the result that what is Christ’s belongs also to us, and what is his desire is also that desire which defines and shapes our lives. How does the explanation of the Creed say it, “That I may be his own and live under him in his

kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.”

So, out of whose heart – Jesus or the believer – does the river of living waters flow? Yes!

Now then, from Christ to the believer (and, thus, all-defining for the believer’s New Adam), that spring of living water “gushes forth” in two ways: (1) springs of faith in God, and (2) springs of fervent love toward one another (gifts of the Spirit are all for *neighbor’s* benefit), as said in our post-communion prayer: “strengthen us through the same in faith toward You and fervent love toward one another.”

First, the springs of living water bring forth faith, life, and salvation. In that water connected with Christ’s Word, first “springing forth” on that first Pentecost, baptism brings with it the gift of the Holy Spirit and, with him, faith and life in Christ Jesus, for the Spirit always points us to Christ. And, as Christ is our Redeemer, Lord, and High Priest, the benefits of the cross that are ours in those baptismal waters “gush” and “overflow” so that we can never adequately express all that Christ has done for us. To say, “Christ died for you” is true, but it can’t capture the magnitude of that sacrifice. To say, “Christ saved and redeemed you” is true, but it can’t capture the magnitude of how that redemption and salvation has brought you out of darkness and into his marvelous light, out of bondage and into freedom to be people of God, out of death and into life.

Second, the springs of living water bring forth (from and through faith) the *fruits* of sanctification, for those, too, are the works of the Holy Spirit. Like the gifts of justification and sanctification – namely, forgiveness, life, salvation – for (as our Men’s Book of Concord group studied in the Large Catechism yesterday) “sanctification is nothing other than the Holy Spirit bringing us to Christ” , we ought also pray for and expect from God the *fruits* – not just the *gifts* – but also the *fruits* of sanctification, as they flow from faith... but ‘pray for and expect’ not as if they’ll simply come coursing through our veins, but as if New Adam ought cherish these good gifts from God and so exercise himself against and put down Old Adam in daily life’s relationships with neighbor and safeguard and cherish the gifts of patience, gentleness, self-control, and the like that spring forth from the faith wrought by the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, the outpouring of the Spirit does not merely bless us with faith in God, but also shapes and teaches and engenders love toward one another. Are not the fruits of the spirit “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness...”, and the like, which speak not simply to your relationship with God, but also with your neighbor. Does not Luther teach us in the Small Catechism to examine ourselves according to the Ten Commandments by considering our station in life; do not the Table of Duties teach us what we Spirit-filled people

owe our neighbors as God's gift to them? – what do you owe your spouse, your parents, children, workers, employers?

And suddenly, we see those springs of living water that are supposed to be flowing out of our hearts are tainted by Old Adam and come flowing out dirty and unfiltered. Suddenly, we see that out of our hearts and conduct and life flow not a pure confession of what Christ has achieved for us and what pure living water flows out of *his* heart, but a sin-filled confession, a confession tainted by jealousy, laziness, selfishness, pride, anger, and a whole host of sins that taint a Christian confession that has reason to confess nothing but life and salvation and joy and Christian love in Christ Jesus.

But, where that which flows out of our hearts is sinful, that which flows out of Christ's is pure. And the living water that flows from his heart, the baptismal water fortified with the gift who is the Holy Spirit and is so lifelong that we may run back to it in confession and, in absolution, may rejoice anew in our baptism... those living waters from *Christ's* heart – literally from Christ's heart when the spear pierced his lifeless side – those living waters bring to us His abounding mercy, and they shower us with and pour over us His steadfast love: "I forgive you your sins."

And in that forgiveness, those springs of water that are to come from the believer's heart are purified, sin is put away, faith in the work of Christ is strengthened, and daily life with and for another is sanctified. Such is the work of the Holy Spirit. Such is the gift of the

Holy Spirit given on Pentecost, not just for Sunday mornings, but for every day of the week. For every day of life, the Holy Spirit fills our hearts with renewed joy in God’s Holy Word... not just joy because of justification and salvation, but also then joy grounded in a love of God’s will for daily life... as Luther says in the Large Catechism, “It [the Word] always awakens new understanding, pleasure and devoutness”... notice that? “New understanding, pleasure, and devoutness” ... not just a devoutness toward God, but an understanding of His will for daily life and thus a pleasure of all the good things He has given us and pleasure in living a life that is a gift to those around us, in accord with His holy will.

On this Pentecost, as Christ gives life to His Church by sending His Holy Spirit, how gloriously it draws unto God all who are far off. How blessed you are to be those beneficiaries upon whom the springs of living water have poured forth in the baptismal life, that your entire daily life may be sustained by the Spirit of Truth to live with faith in God and therefore with fervent love for one another.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +