

“The Spirit Satisfies”

Part 1 of 2009 Fall Preaching Series: *Holy Spirit, Fall Afresh On Us*

John 7:37-39

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost: October 4, 2009 – World Communion Sunday

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I thought that the beautiful season of autumn with its falling leaves would lend itself to the start of a new preaching series. So, beginning today, I am inviting you to join me as I look for inspirational lessons from the natural world around us. I have called our 2009 Fall Preaching Series, *Holy Spirit, Fall Afresh on Us*. During Fall, trees must lose their leaves in order to make way for the miracle of growth of fresh new leaves in Spring. That is a miracle of death and resurrection that occurs in nature every year. How much more we need to depend on God’s spirit to bring new life to us!

To get through the hot summer months trees, plants, and every living thing need water. I remember hearing a song composed in drought-stricken South Africa called *Water for a Thirsty Land*. The lack of water, which we have also known here in the Piedmont, can lead to disaster and death. A water-deprived land is a sad sight.

Yes, it can be a terrible thing to thirst for the earth and its people. It can be still a more terrible thing NOT to thirst. Desire to drink may be a sign that life is exhausted; the absence of such desire may be a sign that life is extinct.

My text today is John 7:37. Jesus says: “***IF*** anyone thirst ...” That is the sole condition upon which we may come to Christ. Thirst! No one makes her way to the well unless she consciously wants water; no one truly contacts Christ unless he is thirsty for “the Living Water” – the Holy Spirit whom Christ has given. And it is God’s Spirit alone who can satisfy our spiritual thirst.

There are four things about thirst, natural and spiritual, which I want to share:

1. First, *thirst is instinctive*. If thirst were not an instinct, the human race would be extinct. As soon as a baby is born it begins to thirst. Spiritual thirst is an instinct, too. There are many expressions of spiritual thirst in the Book of Psalms: “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.” (Ps. 42:2). “O God, thou art my God, I seek Thee, my soul

thirsts for Thee; my flesh faints for Thee, as in a dry and weary land where no water is,” (Ps, 63:1). “My soul thirsts for Thee like a parched land.” (Ps. 143:6).

Do we personally, I wonder, know anything of this profound spiritual craving? Have we arising from the depths of our beings, a thirst for God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Are we conscious of a longing for the living God? The instinct is there – divinely implanted within us. As the newborn baby thirsts for its mother, so the soul thirsts for, and can never be wholly satisfied without, God’s Spirit.

2. My second point is that *thirst is intense*. I have already alluded to our necessity for water. We can live without food far longer than we can live without water. It is our most insistent natural requirement. Without the intake of water, the fearful intensity of thirst brings about a physical condition known to medical science as “dehydration.” That is not just normal thirst. It is an abnormal, pathological condition due to water deficiency.

Years ago, a troop of cavalry on the march in the sandy wastes of Texas got lost. In that arid region under the scorching sun the troop experienced all the horrors of extreme thirst. Writing about it afterwards, an army surgeon who was with the party, recorded that the curious thing was that, even when the water had been found and the soldiers had drunk of it freely, it took one or two days before they began to feel the effects of it: the reason being, as he explained, “when thirst takes deep hold, it does not concern one organ of the body merely, but all the organs of the body.”

Something similar can be said of spiritual thirst: it is not just the expression of a part of the human personality, but the expression of the total personality. In the case of spiritual dehydration, it is the whole person that cries out passionately for the Holy Spirit who alone can satisfy our spiritual thirst. John Stott, a British preacher, evangelist, and author, declared that the Christian is a “spiritual dipsomaniac, always thirsty, always drinking!” And that is an accurate description of a Christian’s condition.

Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well, “Whoever drinks of the water I shall give will never thirst.” (Jn. 4:14). But it is evident from that context that Jesus meant “shall never thirst for **anything else**.” True followers of Jesus Christ are in a paradoxical

position: they are always thirsty and yet always satisfied. Someone has put it this way: “Christians are satisfied with a dissatisfied satisfaction!” How true is that of us today? Are we dry, or are we thirsty? How intense is the thirst that has brought us to worship today? I have this idea that the more thirsty we are . . . the more intense the thirst . . . the more desperate we are to find Living Water . . . the more we will imbibe God’s Spirit in an environment of worship, fellowship, and service. Drinking deeply at the wells of Living Water results in spiritual satisfaction. Thirst and satisfaction are two sides of the same coin: the more intense the thirst, the more satisfying God’s Spirit.

3. Note, thirdly that *thirst is individual*. Naturally speaking, that is obvious, but it is by no means so apparent from a spiritual point of view. It is so much easier to hide in the crowd, hoping to get sprayed every now and then with the “water of life.” It is no good relying on getting wet in the crowd – even if it feels like a good soaking once in a while. Let me make one thing perfectly clear: there is no substitute for an individual soaking of the Holy Spirit. As Michael Harper reasonably remarks: “If **thirst** is Jesus’ condition for our coming to him for power, then it follows that **drinking** will be the means of appropriation.” Jesus says, “Whoever thirsts . . . let them come to me and **drink**.” The apostle wrote: “We all were made to **drink** of the one Spirit.”

I would be the last person to dispute that Christianity has a social dimension, but it is also a very personal affair. It is just not possible for someone else to come to Jesus, or to respond to God’s Spirit, on my behalf. It is not possible to receive the Living Water by proxy! I can’t rely on your coming and drinking for me; nor can you rely on my coming and drinking for you. The fullness of God’s Spirit . . . the release of the Living Water in our lives . . . is freely available only if and when **each one of us** comes to Jesus and drinks . . . only if and when **you** come to Jesus and **you** drink . . . and **I** come to Jesus and **I** drink.

4. The fourth and final point I wish to make about thirst is this: *thirst is infectious*. Ever watched a person drinking an ice-cold soda on a really hot, humid day and felt like ordering one for yourself? Watching, observing others drink is infectious, isn’t it? It wants to make us drink as well.

The same is true of a Christian who drinks the Living Water promised by Jesus ... “Out of her heart . . . out of his heart . . .” Jesus said, “shall flow rivers of Living Water.” One way to interpret this scripture is to say that if we are responsive and allow the Holy Spirit to fall afresh on us, we will have living waters that will flow out to others . . . infect others. Putting it another way, we are promised that through the release of God’s Spirit in our lives we will be a strength and inspiration to others around us. The Holy Spirit will infect others through us for good and for God. We should never underestimate the importance of the Living Water for ministry and for service.

As we prepare to come to the Lord’s Table, we are invited to come to Jesus ...to drink at the rivers of Living Water ...to be refreshed by God’s spirit. By coming and drinking, we will be saying “yes” to a spiritual instinct . . . we will find our intense spiritual longing will be satisfied . . .and we will be saying “yes” to a deep desire within us to be infectious, contagious followers of Christ. If we will respond this way, we will not be disappointed with the living waters. God’s Spirit will satisfy our every longing.

The Spirit satisfies. Come and find that to be true.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.