

I'm Thirsty
March 22, 2023
Fifth in a Series of Seven Sermons

John 19:28, 29 - Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus's lips.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Most of us aren't thirsty in the physical sense of the word. We're never very far away from a variety of drinks, be it water, coffee, tea, soda, and the list goes on. One of my favorite things about Tallahassee, Florida was that for the first (and only) time in our lives, we had a refrigerator that magically produced water and ice upon demand. Many of us have developed a habit of carrying around and sipping from large and fancy water bottles. Our medical friends urge us again and again to drink 8 glasses of water a day, or a certain number of ounces of water per half pound of body weight. The famous quarterback Tom Brady reportedly drinks up to 2.3 gallons of water a day. Obviously, he doesn't drink because he's thirsty, but as part of a high protein diet and for the sake of maintaining his athleticism.

In our text for today, scholars suggest that Jesus drank not so much because he was thirsty, but for the sake of fulfilling all prophecy. In fact, this was not the first time Jesus had been offered a drink. Both Mark and Matthew observe that he was offered bitter wine just prior to being crucified (Matthew 27:34; Mark 15:23). Perhaps this was intended as an intoxicant for those about to suffer pain. Historians tell us that it was a custom for a group of Jerusalem women, as an act of piety, to provide for a condemned man a vessel of wine containing a grain of frankincense to numb the pain. Jesus refused to drink that wine. Since he had committed himself to offer up the perfect sacrifice, scholars surmise that. To attempt to lessen the pain of this sacrifice would have somehow been going back on this commitment.

It may be that Jesus was willing to have his thirst quenched at this point so that he had enough strength to cry out his last words, "***It is finished.***" ***And "into your hands I commend my spirit."***

Tonight I invite you to give some thought to being thirsty and to rejoice that Jesus suffered all, including being thirsty, at the cross. Over the years, we have seen all kinds of folks recovering from a major procedure or approaching their final breath

who were extremely thirsty. Many of our loved ones have depended on caretakers or family to give them small amounts of water, perhaps an ice chip or two, or maybe a moist swab.

Old Testament history records all kinds of individuals or groups of people who cried out that they were thirsty.

There were the Israelites crying out in the wilderness, ***“Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”***

There is the story of Samson thinking he would die of thirst. In that story of Samson trying to free his people from the Philistines, the men of Judah had taken Samson. They bound him with new ropes and handed him over to the Philistines. At which point Samson broke loose, he killed a thousand of them with the jawbone of a donkey, after which time, he cried out to God in thirst, “You have granted this great salvation by the hand of your servant, shall I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised? To which God responded by splitting open a rock formation, water came forth, Samson drank, he was revived, and judged Israel for an additional 20 years.

Fast forward to the story of Jesus conversing with the Samaritan woman at the well. A conversation which ends with Jesus inviting her to drink of the living water and never be thirsty again.

Tonight, we hear the very source of living water cry out, “I thirst.”

This is the shortest statement that comes from the cross. In Greek it is only one word of four letters. It comes from a blood-stained cross, in between, “Why have you forsaken me?” and “It is finished.” It is in fulfillment of what the Psalmist had said in chapter 69, “They gave me vinegar to drink for my thirst.

Tonight I invite you one more time to come to the cross with whatever is making you thirsty. That is to say, whatever is causing you to be weary, worried, or wondering. Come with every bit of trouble and trial and tribulation that is threatening to overwhelm your soul. Come with every last one of your regrets, your failure, and your faults. Come and see one more time, how deep and how wide and how long is God’s love for you, that he spared not even his only and beloved Son. Come and see how Jesus fulfilled each and every Old Testament prophecy, without exception, to perfection, for you. Come and listen as the Holy Spirit invites you to admit the times your hungering and thirsting have gone in the

wrong direction. You see, it is here at the cross tonight that the Spirit of God has one more opportunity to enlighten us with his gifts and sanctify us in our faith. One more opportunity He has to lighten our loads, to wash away our anxiety, and to calm down and to have our spiritual thirst quenched.

Three brief meditations tonight, one regarding what we thirst for according to our sinful nature, the second what it is that our Savior has always been thirsty for, and third, what we will be thirsting for when the Spirit of God is controlling and compelling us.

Meditation #1 is that at the cross, we admit that by nature, we are thirsty to do wrong. Hunger and thirst are frequent human urges. The Bible often uses hunger and thirst to exemplify powerful desires inside of us. Isaiah said it this way, *“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?”*

By nature, there is a thirst deep in our hearts to rebel. When Adam and Eve looked at the forbidden fruit, they wanted to eat it, they ate what they wanted to eat, and ever since, our desires have been poisoned. We thirst for liquor, we hunger for forbidden sexual pleasures, we crave power and position, and the damage done is beyond imagination. It is part of our nature to be consumed with chasing after money and the happiness it can buy. To go hard after success and the here today/gone tomorrow pleasure it can provide. To recognize that underneath all of those cravings is a desire for me, myself, and I to be front and center.

Meditation #2 is that at the cross, we see just how deep was our Savior’s thirst for our souls. Isn’t this why the Lenten season is one of our favorites? It’s during Lent that we keep on bringing our tired and burdened souls to Christ at the cross, where we find Jesus hungering and thirsting after a relationship with each one of us. It’s during Lent that we see each year what He was willing to endure, that the wrath of a righteous God could be satisfied, that our sins might be forgiven, that our hearts could be redeemed, and that our sorry souls might be saved.

It was for us that Jesus was betrayed, arrested, and dragged back and forth from one unjust judge to another. It was for us that the innocent Son of the living God was abused, ridiculed, spit at, beaten up, slapped around, and hollered at on his way to being declared guilty. There were no concession stands on the way from Gethsemane to Golgotha, there were no refrigerators dispensing water, there were

no encouragers along the route offering drinks or relief of any kind. Jesus had been tortured about as much as a man could be tortured without being killed. Some criminals in those days would hang on a cross for days until they died. Jesus hung for six hours with muscles that were strained, wounds that were inflamed, and a bare body that was exposed first to the merciless heat of the sun, and then the cool of the darkness when, worldwide, the sun stopped shining.

While in the Garden, Jesus asked His disciples to watch and pray and for His Father to let this cup pass, if it was his will. But since then, Jesus had been focusing on the needs of others. Instead of asking somebody to help him carry the cross, He asked His Father to forgive those who were nailing him to it. Instead of cursing the injustice of what was happening, He looked the repentant thief in the eyes and promised him paradise. Instead of crying out for his mom and friends to do something to make the pain stop, he made sure that his mom would be well taken care of.

Only this one time on the cross does Jesus ask for some help. Instead of asking a friend or one of the archangels to serve him, he asks a soldier on guard. In those days, soldiers on guard would have been issued a jug full of bitter vinegar as part of their rations. And so a soldier takes a sponge, fills it with what some have labeled a cheap sour wine, and holds it to his lips.

One more time tonight we find Jesus loving the world more than he loved himself. He approaches death with a picture of redeemed sinners making it through this vale of tears and joining him in heaven someday. He accepts the hot anger of God for our sins burning down on him, he suffers all that we should have suffered, he pays the price we could never begin to pay. He dies the death that gives us life.

Meditation #3, in closing, is that at the cross, Jesus would invite us to be thirsty for righteousness. To be thirsty for righteousness is to desire above all else to be right with God, it is to cry daily for the forgiveness of sins, it is to ask again and again for a second chance, it is to crave the one thing needful.

Matt Geppert from Southeast Asian Prayer Center tells a story of a teenage Tibetan mother who once put her dying baby in his arms. Both of the child's lungs were filling with fluid, and her little heart was swelling fast. They knew that she would not live through the night.

The mom looked into his eyes and pleaded for him to take this child and raise her as his own. "I'd rather her live with you than die with me" The hospital

administrator standing nearby responded, “We can treat this child, and she will be well, but unless she moves to a lower elevation and receives consistent care, she will die or be back in a month.” She added, “Matthew, children like this come here every day from all over Tibet. Do you plan to take all of them?”

Also standing nearby was a Chinese couple called by God to be there in that moment, who agreed to take all of these children and make sure they were raised and cared for and loved. In that hour a ministry was born that now serves hundreds of children. The most important part of this story, of course, is that this organization prays for and works towards raising up children and adults who will be hungering and thirsting for righteousness in all the chapters of their lives.

Matt Geppert then writes, “I believe that it is far greater to be a small part of a big thing than to be a big part of a small thing.”

The kingdom of God is like a congregation of believers full of folks who strongly desire to seek first the kingdom of God, but are daily tempted to be distracted. They have their bad days, their good days, and their best days. On their bad days, they are thirsty for that which satisfies only for a little while. On their good days, they drink of the living water only Christ offers. And on their best days, they help others to drink that living water and never to be thirsty again. On every one of their days, they are the children of God, precious, redeemed, forgiven, and contented. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.