

## **“The problem of thirst” John 17:37-39**

**“On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “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.’” Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Listen, brothers and sisters, listen! Yes, you, listen! Jesus is crying out to you, He wants you to hear this, for this is so, so important. What do you mean, pastor? What is Jesus crying out? I am referring to our Gospel reading. Briefly the context.

That was a time of one of the Jewish feasts, the feast of Tabernacles. All the feasts were given to the Jewish people to remember the mighty works of their God. This one reminded them of how for 40 years during their journey through the wilderness they dwelled in tents and how the Lord provided for all their needs.

Every day of the feast as a part of sacrificial ritual priests would draw water from a special fountain, carry it to the temple and pour it at the altar. That part of the ritual reminded how the Lord quenched their thirst during their time in wilderness, and it also served as a prayer for the rain and fruitfulness of the land for the year to come.

Jesus’ opponents already had been looking for opportunities to arrest Him. And what did Jesus do? He still shows up to the feast of Tabernacles. Not only He shows up, but He also engages in teaching in the Temple.

And when the officers are sent to arrest Him, He does this. **“On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “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.’”**

Listen carefully to what happened. Teaching would usually be done sitting, and there would be no need to cry out, as those who wanted to listen would have gathered around. But in this instance Jesus stood up and cried out.

This was important! Jesus was saying something very important and He wanted as many as possible to hear His message. He wanted you to hear His message. What was the message? **“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.’”** If only we could hear and understand His claims and promises!

Now, let’s see what is so important. In these few words Jesus describes our problem, He provides for us a solution and He offers incredible encouragement. Let’s see, our **problem, Jesus’ solution and His encouragement** to us.

What is that problem? Jesus said **“if anyone thirsts...”**. *If anyone thirsts...* This is where we can see the problem that plagues humanity. The problem is not so much the thirst itself; we could say, the problem is that we are not aware of the nature of

this thirst. Sure, our souls thirst for many things. We all have those deep longings, those yearning that we struggle to put in words. Throughout our lives we are restless, looking for something else, for something more. What is it?

We are unsatisfied with our lives, unhappy, wondering whether there is more, and where that more could be found. How to get there... This is what drives us, this is what drives our lives. We toil with this often-unconscious hope that if this or that would happen, if I get or achieve this or that then, then...

Or we drug ourselves, sometimes with entertainment, trying to escape this reality where there seems to be no answer to what we long for. We spend our lives searching for something we struggle to articulate. As time goes, we come to realize that nothing quenches our thirst. Nothing in this life, nothing in this world.

Sure, we may get some temporary satisfaction, some transient joys, but they all quickly fade. Why? Because we expect that created things, that something in this created world will give us what only God the Creator Himself can give us. And sometimes we just lose hope, become cynical, and settle for whatever is there.

That's our story, unless we understand that the thirst that we have can be satisfied only by One, by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. You see, how important this is. Unless we are clear about the nature of our thirst, we can't hope to satisfy it.

This is our first task as Christians. In Lutheran tradition we describe this reality by means of the Law and the Gospel. The Law shows our sin, our problem, our thirst, the Gospel shows our Saviour, our solution, the fountain of the living water.

But our first problem is that we are not clear about the nature of our thirst. You can offer the most powerful life-saving medicine to someone for free, but why would they care if they believe they are well?

You can try to lead people to the very source of living water, Jesus Christ, but why would they listen, if they don't understand the nature of their thirst. This is what we need to show them. Easier said than done, right?

But how can we do that? It may not be that easy, but with God's help that is not impossible. Think about those people whom God has placed in your life, think about those who don't know Jesus yet. Think about their lives, what drives them?

What do they thirst for? What do they miss from the abundance that our Triune God offers us for free? Are they trying to make their lives matter? Are they trying to live up to certain standards to feel good about themselves? Are they worried about the future and trying to secure it? Do they chase approval and recognition from others? What drives them? What do they thirst for?

And, actually, we could start by asking these questions to ourselves. What do we thirst for, what drives us? If by God's grace we can understand our spiritual thirst, we will be better with others as well.

And this is where Christian community is such a blessing. We don't have to do this on our own, we have brothers and sisters whom God has placed in our lives, so that we can be blessed through them, through their support, through their wisdom.

This is why we are here as a community, ask your pastor for help, ask brothers and sisters to share their experience, that is a joyful privilege entrusted to us by the Lord of the Church Jesus Christ. That much about our problem.

But then Jesus immediately gives His solution. The solution to all our soul thirst. **"Let him come to me and drink. If you are thirsty, come to me! Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."** (Mat 11:28)

Who can come to Jesus? Who does He invite? There is only one condition. Only one. **"If anyone thirsts..."**. That's it. This is the only condition. Often those outside Christian community have quite a sharp sense of God's holiness. They sense that they are not worthy, that they are not good enough, that the earth will open to swallow them and the roof of the church will fall in if they enter God's house.

That is true, none of us is worthy to come in the presence of the Holy God. Neither those outside Christian community, nor those inside. None of us can do it based on our goodness or high morals, or German surname, or anything else.

As Paul summarizes: **"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."** (Rom 3:10-12)

The Good News, the Gospel is that Jesus doesn't require you to be righteous. Jesus doesn't require you to be perfect, or holy, or innocent, or virtuous, or moral, or with the right pedigree, He doesn't even require you to be at least better than others. No!

He has only one condition. If you are thirsty... If by God's grace you have been made aware about the nature of your thirst. Don't worry about improving yourself before you come to Jesus. We can't do much anyway. Not with our heart anyway.

But He can. He is the Creator. And He desires to quench your thirst, He desires to bless you, to give you a new heart and a new life with Him. And He will give it to you, that is His promise. "If you thirst, just come to me!" Come and let Jesus take care of the rest. For He is the solution to our thirst. Perfect, complete, sufficient and permanent solution. And He will never let you down. Never.

Finally, Jesus also gives us encouragement. And what encouragement it is! **"Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"** This is incredible. Just incredible.

Did you hear what Jesus says? What will happen?! If you recognize your thirst, if you come to Jesus, out of your heart will flow rivers of living waters. Out of your heart will flow rivers of living water! How about that?! Are you surprised?

We should be. Jesus doesn't say that "fine, if you come to me, you will never thirst again." Yes, He certainly says that much, but He also says so much more. Not only will your thirst be quenched, but from your heart will from rivers of living water.

What does this mean? John explains: **“Now this He said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive.”** We often think about the Spirit as the flames of fire, as He came down on the disciples in that first Pentecost.

Here Jesus uses another metaphor, water, even rivers of living water. This is a picture of super-abundance, refreshment, and fullness of life. Not just quenched thirst. Not just living water, no! but rivers of living water flowing out from you.

This is true. When you come to Jesus, He embraces you, quenches your thirst, He gives you words of eternal life, and He sends His Spirit to dwell with you. Then He sends us to share these words of life and to let the rivers of living water run.

This is a really big deal. We all, each Christian has been given the words of eternal life. When you speak to them, the rivers of the Holy Spirit flow forth and ... where and when it pleases our good Lord, true faith in Christ is created and someone receives the gift of eternal life in New Heavens and New Earth. As you speak...

We need to see the greatness of this and remember: **“Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required.”** (Luke 12:48) And: **“Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”** (Luke 3:9)

One of the most notable scholars in the field of the Church's mission Dr Christopher Wright is credited for saying that Jesus didn't invite the Church to participate in His mission, He created the Church for His mission. He created us for His mission.

And we may wonder why our Lutheran Church is shrinking. This may be the answer. Are we bearing the fruit that we are expected? Are we living out who we are created and redeemed to be? Are we letting the rivers flow through us?

We may have recognized our thirst. We may have come to Jesus. But if we do not let the rivers of the life-giving Spirit flow through us, if we don't let them flow into the lives of those who still suffer from this thirst, our joy will never be complete. We won't be fruitful. Our lives will not be complete.

This is what we are reminded of this Pentecost. About the deep thirst of our souls. About the only One, who can quench it. About how gracious and welcoming He is; whoever you are, whatever you have done, He invites you: “Come to me!”

And then He, the very source of life, makes us partakers in His new life creating mission, where we all, whatever ordinary we may think we are, by our speaking alone, are able to give this new life, eternal life to another human being. To someone you love. What a privilege!

May our Lord Jesus Christ who called His sufferings and cross glory for your sake, may He bless us that we can be like the Samaritan woman at the well, overjoyed, excited, letting the rivers of living water flow, telling everyone about this incredible God and then... seeing other come to Jesus and their thirst being quenched.

May the Lord help us be fruitful! Come, Spirit, come! Flow, rivers, flow!

Amen.