

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Sunday After The Ascension, May 12, 2024

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 220 (218:6) 296, 277, 214:5
Lessons: Genesis 32:25-31; Acts 8:12-25; Luke 9:51-56
Text: John 7:33-39
Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear Fellow Redeemed:

The words of our text were spoken by Jesus at the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. This was a feast that God had commanded the people to observe every year. It was to remind them of the time when they passed through the desert and lived in tents. It also was to remind them of the harvest and the thanks they owed to God for giving them the fruit of the land of Canaan. It was celebrated for seven days during the seventh month of the year, and the eighth day was a day of special assembly. On each day of the feast there was a special ceremony. Water was drawn from the Pool of Siloam in a golden pitcher, together with a pitcher of wine, and poured into two perforated bowls on the west side of the altar. The trumpets sounded while the people sang, ***“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation,”*** Isaiah 12:3.

When Jesus spoke the words of our text he referred to this ceremony at the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast was abolished as were all the requirements of the Ceremonial Law when Jesus made a new covenant of grace. But the words of Jesus remain, and when we consider them prayerfully, we find that our text is summarized very well in these words:

LET US SEEK THE LORD WITH OUR WHOLE HEART.

- 1. We want to escape the judgment that fell upon the scoffing Jews and obtain the grace that was granted the heathen Greeks.**
- 2. We want to quench our spiritual thirst by faith in Christ’s living water.**
- 3. We want rivers of living water to flow out from us.**

“Jesus said, ‘I am with you for only a short time, and then I go to the one who sent me. You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come.’” Many of the Jews, especially the Pharisees and the chief priests were angry with Jesus and wanted to arrest him. It was to these people that Jesus spoke the words of our text. The Jews wanted to get rid of Jesus and he reminded them that soon he would not be with them any longer. Therefore there was little time left for them to accept him as their Messiah. Luther used these words as an earnest warning to Germany. He wrote, “Here we assume that the Word will remain with us always, although, in fact, it stays and endures but a short time before it is gone. If you do not accept it gratefully and reverently, you will soon be without it. And once the Word is gone, the time will come when you would fain be pious and be saved; you will want to obtain God’s grace, forgiveness of sin, and heaven. But all will prove futile. You will not find grace, forgiveness of sin, life, and righteousness,” *Luther’s Works, Vol. 23, p.263.*

Let this also be a warning to us. Jesus speaks of ***“a short time”***. Let us remember that it takes only a short time to repent and find Christ while he still offers himself to us. But those who despise Christ and his Word when he gives his time of grace never repent until it is too late.

Jesus told the Jews that soon he would go back to the heavenly Father who sent him. Soon Christ's work of redemption would be completed and he would return to heaven. Then the Jews would seek Jesus and would not find him and they could not go where Jesus had gone. Jesus speaks of their seeking him in vain in their unchanged condition. The book of Proverbs speaks of such seeking. ***"Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me. Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD."*** Proverbs 1:28-29. That is how people seek the Lord when the day of grace is past. And the terrible result is that they will be in hell where they will suffer everlasting death and damnation because of their unbelief.

"The Jews said to one another, 'Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him? Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks? What did he mean when he said, 'You will look for me, but you will not find me,' and 'Where I am, you cannot come'?" The words of Jesus made the Jews all the more angry and they mocked his words of warning. Where will this fellow go, they wanted to know. Will he perhaps go where the dispersed Jews outside the holy land lived among the heathen Greeks and teach the Greeks? They thought, of course, that Jesus would never do this, but they wanted to make fun of him and ridicule his words.

What they thought would never happen, did happen. The Apostle Paul and other apostles went to the Gentile nations and first preached the Gospel of Christ to the Jews who had gone there. Then, when the Jews rejected the Gospel, they preached to the Greeks.

Surely we today should not be like the unbelieving Jews that we cannot make head or tail out of the words of Jesus. Rather, we should want to obtain the grace that was given to the people in all the lands where the apostles went. We also need to hear the Law of God to show us our sins and the Gospel to show us our Savior.

In seeking the Lord with our whole heart, let us hear **about quenching our spiritual thirst by faith in Christ's living water.**

2.

"On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.'" Jesus had ended his discussion with the stubborn unbelieving Jews. Now our text speaks of the eighth day of the feast as the greatest day because of the special ceremonies. The people gathered together to witness these ceremonies and to sing Psalms 113-118. On this day Jesus did something unusual. He had been accustomed to preaching in a synagogue or outside the cities in a quiet manner. But here at this feast Jesus stood in a prominent place and cried out his important message, "If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink." The ceremony of pouring water into a bowl while the people sang "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation" commemorated the water that gushed out of the rock at Meribah to quench the thirst of the people of Israel traveling through the desert. Jesus in our text speaks of spiritual thirst. He is the true Rock of Salvation. His grace and gifts, the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, are the true waters of life that come from the Rock Jesus. If anyone really thirsts for salvation means that he realizes that he is a sinner and needs salvation. To come to Jesus and drink means to receive Christ in true faith.

The words that Jesus had spoken to the unbelieving Jews were the means for producing spiritual thirst so that the Jews might repent. That is the purpose of the Law of God, to show us our sin and need of salvation. Christ is the living fountain out of whom flow the waters of salvation. We cannot come to Christ and drink of our own ability. Christ himself draws us to him by the preaching of his Word. ***"Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ,"*** Romans 10:17. It is a sad thing when people stubbornly refuse to believe. Let us by the grace of God seek the Lord with our whole heart and trust in Jesus. Let us refresh our parched souls in the fountains of God's grace in Christ. Let us believe on him without any doubting. He and he alone can give us that living water so that we will never thirst again.

There is yet another reason why we should seek the Lord with our whole heart. **We want rivers of living water to flow out from us.**

3.

Jesus said, ***“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.”***

Whoever believes in Jesus in true faith will have his spiritual thirst quenched. Remember what Jesus told the woman at Jacob’s well: ***“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life,”*** John 4:13-14. For the believer in Christ also a more glorious result will follow. Not only will he himself be fully satisfied with salvation, but he will be the means whereby others may refresh their parched souls. To put it in another way, Jesus is the fountain. Faith is the drinking of the water of life. The vessel receiving the water is the new man in us, the new man who daily arises and serves God in righteousness and purity. The water is true life. The living water flowing from within the believer signifies the saving effect it has upon other people.

Streams of living water have indeed flowed from many believers to benefit those who hear the Gospel preached. Think of the apostles when they preached and the results of their preaching. ***“More and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number,”*** Acts 5:14. After the great persecution of the believers when they were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, we are told, ***“Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went,”*** Acts 8:4. Think of the eunuch of Ethiopia asking Philip about what he read in Isaiah about the Lamb of God. Philip explained this to him. We are told, ***“Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus,”*** Acts 8:35. Think of the great blessings we have received through Martin Luther’s words written at the time of the Reformation. Luther wrote on the words of our text, ***“He calls the Word of God a stream advisedly, for it performs many great acts. It rushes along like a torrent. Such is the effect of Peter’s message on Pentecost (Acts 2:41), when with one sermon he drives and washes, as with a stream, approximately 3,000 people from the devil’s realm. In one hour he delivered them from death, sin, and devil. That is not apparent, but the Word does have this great power. The stream revived them and brought them to Christ. Those who come to Him and the Gospel are to have the distinction of rendering great service. Father and mother can comfort and teach servants, children, and neighbors not to fear or despair. They can be of help to them, for from their bodies issues living water that refreshes and strengthens the soul in all distress and affliction.”***

May God give this blessing to us that we put away our self-righteous pride and believe in Jesus. May God also grant that we may be a blessing to others as we share the Gospel message with them. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

(Reprinted from a Ministry By Mail sermon for May 4, 2008)