

*Texts: Psalm 147:1-11; John 7:37-52:*

*Subject: Living Water*

*Theme: From the Firehose*

Seventh Sunday after Epiphany, February 20, 2022; Living Hope Lutheran, Las Vegas, NV

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

I grew up in South Florida, where the summers are hot and muggy. It's a special place where you can take a shower after a day of yard work, walk outside, and feel like you never towed off. Delightful. In the summer months, the afternoon thunderstorms dump inches of rain all at once, and the predictable precipitation fills empty canals and discarded tires making a nice home for the mosquitoes. That's my home. Insects aside, the water is life giving, for trees, flowers and grass, for animals and people too. I miss the rain sometimes. Here in our dry climate, we need the rain too. It's so rare, that it causes a commotion - it's front page news when we get a good rainstorm, right? The kids will sit at the window and watch the flash floods roll down our street, taking an empty trash can for a ride, or run out back and get wet. That living water rushes down the Spring Mountains, trickles through the washes and flows out to the wetlands, and brings life for our desert home. It has been dry here for a long time. It's been 32 days since our last measurable rain.

In Jerusalem, the people have come from all around for a festival. Last week we heard Jesus talking about the bread of life, that happened during the festival of Passover, as they ate unleavened bread, and remembered the flight from Egypt and God's liberation of the people from oppression and slavery. This week we hear Jesus speaking during the festival of *sukkot*. This was a fall festival, when the land had been dried up, and the processional included people pouring out water as they called for God

to send life giving rain. During those dry months, water would mean life, prosperity, and new birth. The people want water, and Jesus claims to have what they need. "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink."

Jesus quotes an unknown scripture here - "Out of His heart shall flow rivers of living water" (v.38). The word translated in our bibles here as "heart" *koilia*, is more accurately *womb, or belly*. In Hebrew culture the belly was really the seat of emotion, as we would think of heart. Water and new birth are connected in so many ways. In scripture the spirit - a wind from God - hovers over the waters at creation, when the world was born. In old television shows and novels, men are tasked with boiling water when a new baby is being born. Yes, the reason is usually to get them out of the way and give them a task to do. Midwives will use the boiling water to make a soothing tea or hot compress for the new mother, to begin the healing process during and after the baby comes into the world.

What new life is Jesus bringing to birth in the world?

Those who heard Jesus' teaching might have been confused at first. Some believed, some didn't. John's disciples were likely a Jewish group excommunicated from the mainstream, and we can read this fourth gospel in that context - their practices were different, and the power that rested with the authorities in the community was often wielded against them, and of course Jesus himself. These leaders are upset by Jesus' teaching, and can't believe him to be the promised one, since they know him to be from Galilee. They are agitated, and have been since Jesus turned over the tables in the temple. Some are wondering if he was the messiah, others are looking to get rid of him.

According to John, Jesus is not from Galilee - he's the Word made flesh - and comes from above - from God.

Something new is happening. Maybe we feel it now. In many places the winter weather is melting away. Here we know it's almost Spring. We hope to get some rain. We're making plans for summer vacations, and there is a new energy in our city. We just had the NFL Pro Bowl here, the Hockey All-Star game, last week's Super Bowl was a big deal in Las Vegas. State mask mandates have been dropped - though we continue to take precautions here in worship. After two years of pandemic life, some might be a bit anxious about what happens next. Maybe it was a similar feeling in Jerusalem. Those who had held power were nervous, some of the folks were beginning to long for a change. People were believing in Jesus, especially those who saw the signs, while others could not. Change so often brings fear and conflict.

Jesus' statement about living water is a claim that He is the one that gives life - He is the Savior - the Messiah. The authorities immediately start arguing amongst themselves, "Why didn't you arrest him?" Nicodemus is among them and stands up for Jesus - if only a bit - he's one of the leaders, saying they are supposed to have a trial. His argument seems to get shut down pretty quick. But we can see Nicodemus beginning to come around. We may remember Jesus' words' to him, that "no one can enter the kingdom of heaven without being born of water and spirit" (3:4-5). Water, birth, spirit, & new life were coming.

Water and Spirit - John connects the spirit to the new life Jesus brings, but as yet it had not come to all the believers. The flames of the Holy Spirit would come later, but for now, Jesus was calling the people to come closer, to believe, and seek out the life

giving water. When we first come to faith, we say things like “we’re on fire for Jesus.” Have you heard that? I don’t think that’s a good expression. Fire feeds on what is already dry. The flames consume the wood, and what’s left is ashes. Jesus promises water, to quench the dry land and the dried up life we drag around at times. When we’re in a rut, or we face hardships, or get dragged down by the world around us, our faith can seem dried up. It’s useless.

I was driving the kids to school this week - maybe you saw my post online about sharing one of my favorite musical artists with them - “Weird Al Yankovic.” If you don’t know him, check him out. He’s been performing polka music and parody songs for over 40 years. Back in 1989, Weird Al made a movie called *UHF* about a low budget television show where, as a prize for winning a contest, kids get a special treat - they get to “drink from the fire hose!” Do you ever feel like you’re drinking from the fire hose? When we say that, we usually mean that there is so much coming at us, so fast, we just can’t handle it. But if Jesus is living water, bring on the fire hose!

Give us more! We need that water of life to soak ourselves out of the funk we’ve been in, to wash off our languishing lives and the loss and grief we’ve carried these last two years. I want to drink from that firehose of Jesus’ love and fill up buckets and barrels and carry it out into the world so that new life can bloom. Let’s drink from the Jesus firehose!

When our desert gets watered, life pops up in unexpected places. Flowers show their colors in places we forgot they were planted. Shrubs and bushes paint the landscape with yellow and purple petals. Cacti store up needed moisture and desert wildlife rejoices. Our hearts need that too. We need to be refreshed in our faith, maybe

now more than ever. Jesus word has the power to give us new life again and again. We hear it here and are reminded of the forgiveness, grace and blessings we have received. We are renewed when we gather to confess our sins, and study scripture, and feed neighbors, and work together to advocate, and welcome and seek justice. Jesus is living water for us.

At the festival they pray for rain, for the fields and flocks, the water that brings life will sustain them for another season. Jesus knows what they really need. They want water? Here comes the firehose! Water will flow from the side of the crucified one. When the soldier pierces his side, blood and water will come out - just like they do at the time of our human birth. Jesus knows what we need. We need that living water, Lord! We are born again in Jesus Christ, and have been called to faith through the word - we are washed, welcomed, and sent out proclaiming the good news of the one who was put to death, but is risen from the grave! We don't have a tired out dried out desert of a Lord, but our generous living God-with-us in Jesus, who brings water for the thirsty and bread for the hungry.

Jesus is teaching healing, preparing the people, stirring them up in faith, and preparing them for the out pouring of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is still speaking to us and calling us from dried up faith to a living, thriving abundant life, drenched with the life-giving water from Jesus. Our new birth begins in the waters of baptism, and as we serve our neighbors, delight in studying scripture, sing hymns of praise, and dwell in the rivers of grace that God has given us - we walk wet, enlivened by the water that flows from our Lord. And we will *never* be thirsty, since he is our true source for the bread of life and real life giving water. Amen.