Judges 15:18-20, John 7:37-39

“Water and Spirit”

This past week was a heavy foot traffic week here at First Presbyterian. We had open house for the preschool and we had all these young moms with their little kids stop by during the school day to check us out. It was terrible, the loud jarring sounds of kids asking questions and the moms clamoring away as they drank up all my coke in the well. I wish you had all been here. One of the kids asked his mom when they walked into the church – “What is today?” and the mom said it’s Friday. “Oh, great, it’s Pastor Bob day.” I’ve finally made a name for myself. But watching all those families come in and check out the church and the preschool was an incredible vision for what the church could be like.

But as these young parents and kids came streaming in, life here at FPC went on as normal. We had our Bible Studies on Tuesday morning, our knitters were out and about on Wednesday, regular people came in for visits and inevitably they were almost forced to interact with these outsiders. I got to thinking, we are really the first exposure that any of these people will have with the church. They will interpret who the church is sometimes according to a single individual’s interaction with them. So anytime that we step in the church and this building, we represent. Our first impression leaves them with a good or bad taste of the church.

But isn’t that true not only when you come into these doors, but also as you go out? Actually we will have much more contact with strangers outside of this church and if you represent FPC, even more Jesus Christ our Savior, it should give us pause.

Today in our Scripture we find two very different references to God providing water which rejuvenates, or calls the Holy Spirit to come into our lives which equips us for anything that we need in life. The question we are going to ask ourselves today is that since God has provided us with his Holy Spirit and so really gives us all we need, how are we responding so that when strangers encounter us they are attracted to the God we love and serve, or even to bring it home, so that those within our church are treated as brothers and sisters in Christ. Let’s read and try to figure it out together.

**READ**

It seems like the last three weeks we have read the same Scripture over and over again. You are right, we haven’t gotten very far, but each one of our Savior’s teachings is precious and valuable and so what if going through the Gospel of John takes 5 years? I’m not planning on going anywhere, so why not?

Where do we find Jesus today? Still in the temple. We find him at the same festival where we left him the last couple of days. That festival that he told his brothers he wasn’t going to attend and then he did. Today, finally, is the last day of the festival, the great day as the Scripture calls it. This festival was called the festival of the tabernacles and let’s look at some of the details of this festival because they totally apply to Jesus’ teachings here. I hope that after church today if someone asks you what the preacher preached on you don’t say the festival of the tabernacles and that’s all you come away with.

The festival took place, depending on the year, the end of September or beginning of October. Just like the Lampeter fair. It was tied very directly to the agricultural season and so would have been a festival, were we Jewish, that would have been very important to many of us. Back in Solomon’s day they dedicated the temple during this festival. The festival during its 7 days highlighted the coming of the Messiah, again a theme Jesus stresses in his teachings. Josephus calls it the most important of Jewish festivals, even more so than Passover.

This festival also involved rituals where water was consistently used in the liturgy. Water was such an important necessity in that region, and remains so to this day. It is a necessity over which nations have gone to war over history. It was said that if it rained at all during the 7 day festival that God would bless that region with the rain necessary for the next year. In fact, even today, Jordanian Arabs watch during the festival of tabernacles to see if it rains to know what kind of year it will be for their crops. This has been going on for thousands of years.

During every day of the festival the priest would take a golden pitcher and walk from the temple while he was surrounded by the people and they would go to the Spring of Gihon which fed into the pool of Siloam. Remember the paralyzed man who was waiting for the water to stir, that was at Siloam. See how everything in John is connected. Once the pitcher is full the priest heads back with the people to the sacrificial altar in the temple and in the last day, this day the culminations of the festival the priest would walk around the altar 7 times while the people said out loud the words from Isaiah 12:3 – “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.”

I know, you could have learned about the history of the festival of the tabernacles on the history channel instead of coming to church, but hang in there and you’ll hear a redeeming message of our Savior Jesus Christ and how it all ties into this history. Jesus is in the temple here in chapter 7 during this whole event. At the climax of the service, as the priest is walking around the altar 7 times and the people are chanting the words from Isaiah, Jesus stands up and vs. 37 tells us that he cries out. “Anyone who is thirsty come to me.” He completely interrupts the ritual.

It would be as if during communion today as I was giving the words of institution from I Corinthians one of you stood up and said if you are truly hungry or thirsty come to me and you’ll get your fill. It got the peoples’ attention. Our Savior tells those gathered on the last day of the festival, at the height of the ceremony, in a packed house: Moses filled your ancestors with water from a rock, but now in Jesus those who thirst only need to come to him, and through belief, the water of life will be theirs. Manna was given to the ancestors to fill them on a daily basis, but Jesus is the bread of life who can, if you believe, can fill you for eternity.

Jesus delineates very carefully in vs. 38 that the one who believes, this necessary action of belief that allows our salvation, faith, and His grace have any real affect on our lives, this belief will then manifest itself as a river of living water. I love vs. 38 because in the NRSV it makes very clear that this river will come out of the believer’s heart. It will have a real, visible and impossible to hide affect that the entire world should be able to see, the preschool mom, the member of the church you’re not talking to, the child you are estranged from, the neighbor you’re on bad terms with.

You know, the literal Greek read not flowing from the heart but literally from the gut, the belly. When you get news that floors you we say that it is gut wrenching. This is the idea here in John 7, not a negative but a positive flowing from the belly. Out of our bellies, out of our hearts, shall flow rivers of living water.

In verse 39 we get John explaining Jesus’ words and they come down to water and Spirit. Believers, his disciples had not yet received the Holy Spirit because the real presence of God was there in Jesus Christ. If you look on the cross you will see water and spirit that manifest themselves. Look at John 19:30 and 34. He gives up his spirit. Vs. 34 blood and water come out. I John 5:7 states “There are three witnesses: the Spirit, and water, and blood, and these three are of one accord.”

After Jesus is raised from the dead in the Gospel of John in chapter 20:22, he is with his disciples and we read p “When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Jesus has given us all we need so that living waters will flow out of us in our daily lives. If you look at our first Scripture you will find Samson after decimating the Philistines is parched and God gives him water. We read in vs. 19 of chapter 15 of Judges that “When he drank his spirit returned, and he revived.” Then the last sentence states that he served as a judge for 20 years.

When we receive our baptism we believe as Presbyterians that the Holy Spirit falls on us, either as infants or adults. As a result of that we should have streams of living water flow from us. When people interact with us they see through a prism who we represent.

Today we will take part in the bread and blood and our baptismal promises are always a reminder in communion as well. This meal that we call the Lord’s Supper is exactly that. It is a supper that is provided by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. You know, back in the day in the Presbyterian Church we only took communion once a year, even though Calvin tells us to do it every time that the Word of God is preached because salvation may have germinated in the heart of someone. Before you could take communion you were examined by the pastor and if you passed you were given a token that you presented in church to allow you to take communion.

Communion is for believers, even children who love God as innocently as they do. Communion is for sinners. But our common denominator is that we are believers and upon receiving these elements we recognize what is expected of us. We don’t play church in here and then go out there and conform to the world. No, we are called to transform the world because our bellies are full of the Holy Spirit.

Allow the living water of our Savior to overwhelm you so that in your actions you reflect to whom you belong. Amen.