

Jesus is the source of life! Today on this Day of Pentecost we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit which is given by God to continue all that has begun in Jesus. From the Spirit flows a spring of living water! Because of the Spirit we are able to know Jesus. Because of the Spirit we are enabled to be the people God created us to be.

There is not enough time to process the week we have just lived and I don't know if I even have the words. If you are wondering who to turn to these days, I recommend Jesus. In the three verses from the gospel of John today, Jesus names the people's need as a thirst. Jesus says, "If any one thirsts, come to me." The human need for God is described as "thirst."

This morning we are all too aware of great human need. We have needs in our households due to adaptations we have made to fight the virus. This week we acknowledge the unprecedented loss of over 100,000 lives to COVID-19 in the United States and we have a collective need to mourn and remember. This week we witnessed the murder of a black man which cannot be ignored. We need to deal with this so that our words, "All are welcome" ring true. We gather with all of this need hearing Jesus's cry, "If any one thirsts, come to me." Have you ever had a word of Jesus name your need?

The followers of Jesus waited in Jerusalem for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had instructed them to gather and wait. They waited and prayed not knowing exactly what was about to happen. They did not know exactly what they needed in order to follow Jesus. They are about to find out how all of it works together, God who sent the Son, Jesus who embodied grace and mercy, and the Spirit who gathers and enlivens the new community and keeps it holy and in faith. The disciples learn what their need is through divine action.

The text which is paired with the story of the great day of Pentecost is one which occurs in the midst of Jesus earthly ministry. The setting for the reading in John is the Jewish festival of the Feast of Tabernacles, one of the three major annual festivals of obligation in Jerusalem. In Jesus' day, the Feast of Tabernacles remembered how God had abundantly provided for the people of Israel, how God had tabernacle with them, while they wandered in the dry desert wilderness. God provided by making water flow from a rock. To celebrate this Feast, water is carried in a golden pitcher from the Pool of Siloam to the Jerusalem Temple for seven days as a reminder of the water God made flow from the rock in the desert

so many years ago. During the Feast the resource of water became a sign of hope that promises of God's saving grace would be made real.

On the last day of the festival, at the high point of the Feast, Jesus the source of life cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink!" Jesus promised to give people living water! Obviously Jesus was talking about a need different from rainwater. Jesus speaks of another kind of thirst. The need is like what we find expressed in the Psalms, "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?" (Ps. 42:2)

The Psalmist is aware of having a need of God, but the people in John's gospel do not express their longing in this way. Instead, Jesus names their thirst before they are fully aware of their need. Have you ever had a word of Jesus name your need? I think we are living in times when we find suddenly that the Word is working in us in such a way as to awaken us to a deep thirst which lies within us.

Jesus had awakened a thirst for God previously in John's narrative. Jesus, a Jew, stood at a well, when a woman who was a Samaritan, came to draw water. Samaritans and Jews were mortal enemies. Jesus begins the conversation by asking her to give him a drink, but then he quickly shifts the dialogue and offers her living water. In this conversation Jesus reveals the truth about himself, the woman and God. Although she did not come to the well seeking God, when she is given the truth, she runs with it, going to her town and inviting others to come to Jesus. Jesus was the source of her new life, and she became a resource that led others to Jesus.

Today we celebrate the explosion of the Holy Spirit upon gathered disciples waiting at Jesus' direction. This explosion took the kingdom movement to a whole new level. But it was already at work prior to Jesus suffering and death. Surely the Spirit was there with the woman at the well. God's Spirit generates a new spirit of faith in people. The Spirit evokes faith.

Each of us has a thirst in need of awakening as we juggle our lives with new understandings of science, society and economy. Each of us has something to repent as we begin to see what God is doing.

Remember that after the Spirit comes with power and fire on the Day of Pentecost, Peter boldly preaches, tells the gathered people how they handed Jesus over, crucified him, but God raised him from the dead. Then the people are cut to the heart and ask what they are to do, and Peter tells them to repent and be baptized.

As we are awakened to our need of God, we too, can be cut to the heart. Then we ask, “What do we do?” This week you may have been awakened again, like I have been to the fact that racism exists, in part because of me.

All of us sin and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Racism—a mix of power, privilege, and prejudice—is sin, a violation of God’s intention for humanity. The resulting racial, ethnic, or cultural barriers deny the truth that all people are God’s creatures and, therefore, persons of dignity. Racism fractures and fragments both church and society.

We are thirsty for a way to live daily which is faithful and loving to all our neighbors. We are thirsty for pathways which help us acknowledge loss and death. We find ourselves in need of black lives, because without knowing and loving and ensuring these precious members of the human race can thrive, we find we are dying inside.

Harlem by Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

The poem ends abruptly and dramatically. What does this final question mean? James Smethurst study of the poem suggests some possibilities: written in the 1950's the poem might suggest a feeling of the Harlem riots of 1935 and 1943 and predicts future unrest. In the larger context of the collection of poems of which Harlem is one of many, two other meanings of *explosion* are in play—the rapid growth of a population and the breakdown of a misconception, as when someone or something “explodes” a cultural myth, fantasy, or deeply held assumption.

The Day of Pentecost was an explosion of the Spirit, initiating from the source of life into the people so they could become the resources on the ground, making the world into the new community.

Several years ago St. John's formed a statement which has fueled the ministry and mission here. St. John's Lutheran Church is a people formed in the waters of Christian baptism to be a fountain of life for all who gather, overflowing into a river of compassion for the world. The symbol of living water flowing into our beginning in baptism has helped the people of St. John's form a strong community of faith.

This symbol reminds me of this very text where Jesus declares that he is the true water of life. When the gift of the Holy Spirit is given later at Pentecost, believers and followers of Jesus become resources of life for others. We come to trust that God's Spirit is always available.

We may not always feel God's Spirit, or think that an experience is spiritual. But our feelings are not always trustworthy. What is trustworthy is this, the scriptures story that God's Spirit comes. We can grow to expect that God's Spirit work within us each day. Some days we may sense it deeply. At other times we may not perceive it. Yet, in good times or bad, God's Spirit is with us. God's Spirit is present. A new agent of transformation is surely at work in us, creating us to be a new people today, connected and relating in new and amazing ways.