

May 24, 2026

Pastor Prieue

The Day of Pentecost

John 7:37-39

Drink and Live:

From Dry Wadis to Flowing Rivers

This weekend marks a weekend of holidays. On the church calendar, 50 days after Easter is the day of Pentecost, the day Jesus poured out his Holy Spirit on his fledgling church. On the modern U.S. calendar, Monday is set aside as Memorial Day, to commemorate those who have given their lives in our nation's Armed Forces. For many people, it's also a day off work, and for me growing up, it was the first weekend of summer to go camping.

Coincidentally, our sermon text today, the gospel lesson from John 7, happens not actually at the holiday of Pentecost, but during the Biblical holiday of camping. It was called the Feast of Tabernacles. The word Tabernacle is just basically a word that means "tent". The Tabernacle was the tent of worship for the Israelites while they wandered in the wilderness, living in tents. So the Feast of Tabernacles was kind of like a 7-day-long religious camping retreat where the people were supposed to reenact the wandering in the wilderness by setting up tents to live in. But it wasn't just for them to disconnect from the city and reconnect with nature. This was a festival for them to remember how God provided for their ancestors for 40 years, feeding them miraculous manna and quail, bringing water from a rock to drink in the middle of the dry wilderness.

So the festival of Tabernacles became one of the three major festivals that Jewish men were supposed to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for each year, along with Passover, and the feast of Weeks, which happened 50 days after. (That was the Old Testament Pentecost festival). So Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Festival of Tabernacles, but he did in secret because his brothers, likely the other sons of Mary and Joseph, were giving him a hard time. They were kind of riding him because he thought he was the Messiah. "If you want to be famous, go show your miracles to the world, don't do them in secret." They clearly didn't believe in him at that point. So Jesus pretends like he's not going to go, but then halfway through the week, he does go secretly.

Pretty soon he winds up teaching in the temple courts and they're amazed by his teaching and his learning. But then some of the crowd and the Jewish leaders start to get riled up because they can tell he is claiming to be the Messiah. Some men try to seize him, but the text just says "**no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come.**" (John 7:30)

Things seem to die down until the last and greatest day of the Festival, when all of sudden Jesus stands up and cries out something pretty epic. But before we get to those words, let me set the scene a little bit.

During the days of this week-long festival, the priests in the temple had a custom where every day they would lead a procession down from the temple to the pool of Siloam. The pool of Siloam was a pool filled from the water that came through Hezekiah's tunnel. This tunnel is a little taller than my height, with not even enough room to walk through with your shoulders square. It's pitch black, with water up to your knees running through it for about a 1/3 of a mile from the Gihon spring outside the city. The Old Testament story is that Hezekiah built this tunnel to get water into the city before the Assyrians laid siege to the city. This tunnel brought them water to survive during the siege, so it was a reminder of salvation for them.

Then the priest would carry this water back in a golden pitcher with a joyful procession of singing and dancing going on. The people would sing the song from Isaiah 12, which we sing sometimes too. "Surely it is God who saves me. I will trust in him and not be afraid. For the Lord is my

strength and my sure defense and he will be my Savior..." Then comes the water part. **"With joy will draw water from the wells of salvation."** (Isaiah 12:3)

When they got back to the temple, the priest would march around the altar and then pour this water out on the altar as the people praised God and asked him to bless them with rain for the upcoming year of planting. They also had in mind the prophecy of Zechariah, that when the Messiah would come, **"On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem."** (Zechariah 14:8). Finally, on the last and great day of the Festival, the priest would march around the altar 7 times and then pour out the water on the altar.

Why is all this background important? Because it was on the last and greatest day of the festival of tents that Jesus got up and declared, **"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."** (John 7:37,38). During the high point of the festival, Jesus proclaims that he is the Messiah, who gives living water to drink and in whom is salvation, and he invites all the thirsty to come to him and drink this living water!

First let's talk for a moment about what Jesus means by "the one who is thirsty." The rituals of this festival brought to mind the past events of physical thirst. The Israelites would travel so far in the wilderness and then they would grumble against God because they were thirsty. Jerusalem needed water during the siege or they would die of thirst, but this wasn't about physical water anymore. Jesus was promising living water, like he had done for the women at the well in Samaria.

She was a woman who had tried to satisfy her thirst with relationships and sex. She had 5 husbands, and the man she was living with now who was not her husband, but none of those relationships could satisfy her thirst, because they weren't with God and the living water he gives.

You and I also know what it is to go searching for satisfaction, and something to quench our thirst in all the wrong places. We thirst for the power and prestige we think our work can bring. We thirst for the pleasure we can find in a bottle, or in someone else's body. We flick through a social media feed of 8 second videos thirsting for drips and drops of satisfaction, for another hit of dopamine, for another like, for another follower, while the rates of anxiety and depression skyrocket, especially among young people.

What will it take for us to realize that all of those streams are dry? And we're like a parched people wandering in the desert trying to sustain ourselves on them. The name for that kind stream that's found in the desert. It's called a wadi—a stream bed that flows right after it rains, but then the days and months go by without rain, and that stream runs dry and there's nothing but a hard, dried-up channel where water used to run. That's a dried-up wadi. You ever wake up in the morning and feel like that? Nothing left, no water in the well, no gas in the tank, no joy in your heart.

My friends, we are all thirsty, but only one thing will satisfy. The Psalmist cried out centuries ago, **"Like a deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. Where can I go and meet with God?"** (Psalm 42:1,2). Your Savior Jesus stands up and answers, **"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink!"** Whoever believes in Jesus drinks from the spring that wells up to eternal life and sends rivers of living water flowing out from them.

Well how do we drink this water often? How do we stay hydrated? How do we keep the water flowing, so we don't turn into a dried-up wadi? We read, hear, learn and take his word to heart! We drink in Christ, where he gives himself, in his Word and sacraments. Another psalmist, David tells us, **"Blessed is the one whose delight is in the Law of the LORD, and who meditates on his Law day**

and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither- whatever they do prospers.” Psalm 1:1-3.

When we drink in the word of God, we also drink in the Spirit of God who points us to believe and trust in Jesus, and not only does this pool up in a well of salvation for us, but it also overflows and flows out of us! Jesus said, **“Rivers of living water will flow out from them.”** Not a little trickle, but a river.

Then the Apostle John gives a little explanation that brings us all the way back to Pentecost. Maybe you were thinking we got stuck on the wrong holiday, the Feast of Tabernacles, but today is Pentecost. Well John brings it full circle for us now. **“By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believe in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.”** (John 7:39).

Jesus was prophesying about how he was going to pour out his Holy Spirit on believers in dramatic fashion and with power. And on the day of Pentecost, the Old Testament festival Weeks, which happened 50 days after Passover to celebrate the grain harvest, Jews from all over the world had come to Jerusalem to make their pilgrimage. That’s when Jesus started pouring out the rivers. 50 days after he, the Passover Lamb, was raised from the dead and glorified. 10 days after his Ascension, he fulfilled his promise send what the Father had promised, to pour out the Holy Spirit and clothe his disciples with power, which is what you saw in our first lesson on the day of Pentecost!

Here’s just a little fun fact, or actually it’s a big one! Those brothers of Jesus that were teasing him. They were now with the disciples, among the group of believers at Pentecost. Now they believed their brother was the crucified and risen Messiah, and now they testified in his name. Two of them, named James and Jude went on to write the Bible books that bear their names, and for centuries rivers of living water have been flowing out from the Spirit-inspired words that they recorded for us.

This, dear friends in Christ, is the transformation *from dry wadis to flowing rivers*, that Jesus has brought about in you too, by the power of the Holy Word, and the Holy Spirit whom he has poured out on you in your baptism. And now your job is not to keep it to yourself, but to flow. Flow like rivers that bless people with water to drink and cleansing for their souls.

In our 2nd reading from 1 Corinthians 12, Paul talks about the Spirit who enables us to confess that Jesus is Lord being the same Spirit who gives gifts to believers to be used for the common good. He gives gifts of wisdom and knowledge, of speaking and healing, doing miracles and serving. And some of those gifts served their purpose in time, to authenticate the disciples’ message, and others of those gifts are gifts that God continues to give to you as your faith overflows to bless others, with your words and actions.

So as we celebrate this day of Pentecost, my last question for you is, *What kind of people ought we to be?* Dry wadis in the wilderness who complain all the time that there’s no water to drink? Or flowing rivers fed by Jesus, the spring of eternal life, who overflow with the Spirit of God and bless all the thirsty we interact with. You know the answer, my friends. Drink deeply of Christ and live, and then flow, rivers, flow! Amen. Hear now the closing words of Jude, the brother of Jesus, **“To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory forevermore. Amen.**