

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

John 7:37-39

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):

Year A - Pentecost, Text: John 7:37-39

RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Year A - Pentecost, Text: John 7:37-39 (or John 20:19-23)

The setting is the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles (7:1–2). This festival was held on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (September–October). It commemorated the wilderness wanderings (Leviticus 23:39–32; Deuteronomy 16:13–15). During this celebration, water was carried in a golden pitcher from the Pool of Siloam to the Temple as a reminder of the water from the rock in the desert (Numbers 20:2–13) and as a symbol of hope for the coming Messianic deliverance (Isaiah 12:3).

The setting is that Jesus is traveling around in Galilee. He did not wish to go to Judea because Jewish leaders there were looking for an opportunity to kill Him. Yet, His disciples encourage Him to go to Judea so that people there might see what He is doing and hear what He is teaching. Although Jesus does not go to Judea, His disciples do. However, sometime later Jesus also goes to Jerusalem — a rather secret visit — to reveal His presence and to do some teaching.

Jesus is the true water of life who turns the symbol into reality (Isaiah 44:3, 55:1). Believers become channels of life to others through Christ's Spirit given at Pentecost after His ascension when He was glorified (crucified, risen, ascended). The gift of the Spirit is a mark of the breaking in of the Messianic Age (Joel 2:28–29; Acts 2:14–21).

Additional Comments by John B. King, Jr.

During the feast, Jesus made a comment about living water: "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water (John 7:38).'" As mentioned above, this statement was solidly anchored in the context of the Feast of Booths which recalled the wilderness wanderings and thus God's provision of water from the rock. Yet, this statement also looked forward to the reality which this water symbolized, the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost. In fact, this is explicitly stated by the text: "Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed

in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (John 8:39)."

Since we now know what Jesus is talking about, we must next understand why He talked about it in the way that He did. Why did Jesus use the metaphor of a river to describe the Holy Spirit? To answer this question, we must briefly examine the salvific theme of Eden which occurs in the sweep of redemptive history from Genesis to Revelation.

In Biblical imagery salvation is often seen as a restoration to Eden. It is precisely this restoration to which Jesus alludes in describing the Spirit as "rivers of living water". To see this point, recall that a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden (Genesis 2:10a). This means that Eden was on top of a mountain and was fed by a spring of water. In addition, we know that Eden was a temple since Solomon's Temple used Edenic imagery, such as the cherubim guarding the Holy of Holies and the brilliant stones on the High Priest's *ephod*.

So, Eden was a mountain temple fed by a spring of water while Solomon's Temple was an image of Eden. Through participation in this Temple, the goal of a full return to Eden was continually placed before the people. And this goal became explicit in Ezekiel's end-time vision of the New Temple (see Ezekiel 40-47) and in St. John's vision the New Jerusalem (see Revelation 21-22). Consistently, Ezekiel says that water flows out of the New Temple, giving life to the earth (Ezekiel 47:1-12). And St. John says that the "river of the water of life" flows out from the New Jerusalem "for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22: 1-3)."

Putting this together, we see that Eden, the New Temple, and the New Jerusalem are mountain temples fed by springs of water. In pointing back to Eden, therefore, Solomon's Temple also pointed forward to the New Temple and the New Jerusalem as the goal of sal-

vation history. Consequently, we may view salvation as a return to Eden through Christ, and it is precisely this return to which Jesus alludes in His comment about rivers of living water flowing out of the hearts of His people.

Since living water is a reference to the Holy Spirit, Jesus is saying that we will become temples of the Holy Spirit and thus miniature Edens within God's New Eden (God's New Creation). How glorious a salvation is this! Through Christ we become temples of the Holy Spirit and thus life-giving springs for the healing of the nations!

All of this should change how we conceive and practice our Christian faith. Rather than seeking to escape the world, we should engage our vocations with the missionary purpose of bringing God's creation to its fullness. Thus, evangelism and discipleship should not have the goal of snatching people from the world. Rather, they should have the goal of getting more people to engage the world in a Christian way! Why play defense when Christ has freed us to play offense?