

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER AND FROM OUR LORD AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST.

The text is John the seventh chapter beginning at the thirty-seventh verse

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” 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.

COVID-19 has come to dominate our thoughts, but I only bring it up because I’ve been reminded of something that I think we all know. If you want to know what someone believes, really believes, don’t ask them—watch them.

We can’t see the virus. we don’t know who’s infected; for those who are infected, we don’t know who will have symptoms or who will not. So whether consciously or not we all do some risk assessment and act out our beliefs.

This is true not only about COVID-19 but about everything in our lives. Our actions betray us.

What flows out of your heart?

I would ask you to recall what life was like before we came to the waters of baptism, but since God declared that He removes our transgression as far as the east is from the west, I’m not going to ask you to go back there even to reminisce. That’s not the point anyway.

So, what is the point?

I grew up in an environment where the point was self-improvement. Can't say I recommend that approach. It doesn't work. The human heart is desperately wicked and it doesn't take a lot of observation to confirm that. We see it in some surprisingly overt behaviors—the way people drive, the way people confront each other, the easy with which we resort to violence, and do I need to mention greed. The human heart is desperately wicked. We have seen it in the way others behave. We have seen it in ourselves. How often have we wanted our own way at someone else's expense?

This heart, mine, yours, this heart we have has betrayed us—and in that it has hurt us and the people we love, more often than we like to think about, how can it be that rivers of living water could flow out that which has so often been selfish and cruel? It would take a miracle.

It did take a miracle. I don't know whether it is best to think of it as one miracle or an incredible series of them; but either way, we have been celebrating since Advent. It may be stretching the meaning of the word to call Lent a celebration, but you know what I mean. Jesus, who was from before the beginning of time took on human flesh. He did not think His status as God of Gods, Lord of Lords a thing He couldn't give up. He stepped down from His throne to become one of us. Having done that, He lived—not like one of us—no, AS one of us—truly human, a child playing with His brothers and sisters; a boy learning a trade from Joseph; a young man working in His home town; a son of Israel going to synagog, hearing the scriptures in obedience to His Father's commands.

And then He began His ministry.

In the waters of John's baptism, Jesus took the weight of the world on His shoulders, and began His long journey to the cross. For three years, he brought healing and hope to broken people—people like us, He taught his disciples and equipped them to become his hands and voice in this world—to become His church.

Then on to something else that is totally impossible, that defies imagination. He became sin that we might become the righteousness of God. Can you even imagine that? Jesus suffered the pain, the death that each of us had rightly earned in our sin and disobedience. All of it—everything; things that we're not even aware of. He carried our sins to the cross and there, suffered death that we might live. And then as if that weren't enough he burst the bounds of death, and rose from the grave and walked with his disciples for a while; until he ascended to be with his father again—everywhere at once in glory as it was from the beginning.

Which brings us to Pentecost.

You know we're not strong enough or smart enough to live the life we were intended to in Christ without help. God knows that too. He knows it better than we do. So he poured out his Spirit on us. The same spirit that hovered over the waters at creation. The same spirit that was on Moses. The same spirit that gave David the Psalms. The same spirit that spoke through the prophets. That spirit is now in us who believe.

Ezekiel wrote of hearts turned from stone to flesh. Jeremiah wrote ***"I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more"***

Today we celebrate what God has done—what the Father commanded, the Son's obedience, the Spirit's constant presence. Today we see, once again, how much God truly loves us, how richly He cares for us, how He has been preparing for us since the beginning of time.

God loves you! How can ***rivers of living water*** flow out of hearts like yours, like mine? Not by our power, but by the power of the Living God who loves you more than you can imagine, who wants to be with you more than you thought possible.

Amen

NOW MAY THE PEACE OF GOD WHICH PASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING,
KEEP YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS IN TO
LIFE EVERLASTING.
