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SERMON TITLE: "Give Him a Chance and You'll Find the Truth"

SCRIPTURE: John 7:37-52

DATE: May 6, 2018

Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

READ Isaiah 44:2-20

What is your favorite Christian holiday or celebration? You might miss other services, but you are not going to miss Christmas, or Holy Week services and Easter. Perhaps you love the ambiance of the candlelight at Christmastime and the anticipation of gifts. Or, you like seeing the cross on Good Friday and the lilies and fresh flowers and new growth that represents resurrection at Easter.

God gives us these celebrations to help us see God and recognize God's plan as it unfolds. God has given festivals and seasons during the year to remember God's promises since Moses and the Exodus.

One was the Festival of Tabernacles. This was an important celebration in the life of Jewish believers. This was their roots. This tradition pointed them to God's promise of salvation. Its symbols represented God's purpose in softening hearts and bringing us new life through this "river of living water" that he promised to pour out those who believe.

On the last day of the festival, several things occurred around a river that came through Jerusalem and collected in the Pool of Siloam. King Hezekiah had built the holding pool to ensure that in times of war and famine, Jerusalem would always have a supply of water.¹ It became a place of pilgrimage where people sought God. Jesus sent a blind man to wash in the pool for healing (Jn 9:1-12).

During the Festival of Tabernacles water from the pool was brought to the temple. On the final day of the festival, people danced around the temple and priests poured out the water saying to God, "Hosanna" – "save now!" They joyfully anticipated God would save and it would be so very good.

Prophets talked about a stream flowing from the temple which gives abundance:

Joel said, "Then you will know that I, the LORD your God, live in Zion. . . . Jerusalem will be holy forever, and foreign armies will never conquer her again. In that day the mountains will drip with sweet wine, and the hills will flow with milk. Water will fill the streambeds of Judah, and a fountain will burst forth from the LORD's Temple, watering the arid valley of acacias (3:17-18)."

Ezekiel said, "Fruit trees of all kinds will grow along both sides of the river. The leaves of these trees . . . will never turn brown and fall, and there will always be fruit on their branches. . . . for they are watered by the river flowing from the Temple. The fruit will be for food and the leaves for healing (47:12)."

Zechariah said, "On that day a fountain will be opened for the dynasty of David and God's people, a fountain to cleanse them from all sins and impurity" (13:1).

All this Scripture is Israel's history and their hope—and ours too. It was a tradition not yet realized; a wonderful dream about God's plan and promise.

After the water is poured, Jesus stood up to speak. He began to say something and his voice was loud. Everyone stopped and turned toward him. READ John 7:37-52.

Imagine the utter surprise of the people. It is a normal ceremony that has been practiced for years and Jesus says it's fulfilled today!

He minces no words. He does not waiver. There is no doubt to his seriousness.

Jesus was enlivening God's promises of salvation for the here and now. He embodied the reality of the water, and the water is the Holy Spirit. Come to me, he says. Then you will have this satisfaction of the quenching of your thirst. They all knew him. He was the teacher they followed who fed them. All experienced it.

But Jesus' words divided them. People began to argue. They began to disagree. They began spreading half-truths. They began name-calling.

Jesus said this would happen, by the way. He said his coming would divide people.

¹ The Pool of Siloam was rediscovered and excavated in 2004. See http://www.nbcnews.com/id/6750670/ns/technology_and_science-science/t/archaeologists-identify-traces-miracle-pool/#.Wutfn5dOmM8, acc. May 3, 2018. 513

Jesus' words that he could quench their thirst are truths that were spoken not just to them, but also to us. We, too, are challenged to turn wholeheartedly to him for the Holy Spirit. Today, as you hear them, what is your response?

Jesus said, "As you believe in me, I give you rivers of waters which will quench your thirst." That's the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is demonstrated through Jesus' teaching and healing and miracles. It's the reality of Truth in your life. You express God's truth when you care about one another, when you pray in faith, when you rely on God's power to walk through the storms of life and seek His help in daily life. The Truth fills the longing in every human heart so you don't follow false things and you don't make up your own rules. When you love God and others, your desire naturally becomes justice and righteousness. You don't walk alone. God has moved into your heart.

Many people believed in Jesus and they found the Truth.

But, the religious leaders had resisted his words and ignored his healings, and did not want to submit to his authority. And where was he from anyway?

Why didn't they ask him? Why didn't they give him a chance? They refused, even though Nicodemis said they should not condemn him without a hearing. They liked their control.

Do we choose what we can control in life or do we choose the Truth?

If you do choose the truth, you will be given the Holy Spirit. This is the Spirit of Truth. The Holy Spirit does something in the here and now. The Holy Spirit strengthens you, builds your character, guides you, and fills your thirst for satisfaction.

Take, for example, Captain Tammie Jo Shults, the Southwest Airlines pilot who brought Flight 1380 to safety when its engine blew, shooting debris into the fuselage and shattering a window, causing the cabin to lose pressure, which caused the plane to drop 20,000 feet in six minutes. She did not panic but said God helped her land the plane with a hole in it. Her first words: "God is good!"

But that was not new for her. She said God had enabled her to do all that she did—like wanting to be a Navy fighter pilot. It took her two tries to convince the Navy. She persisted saying, "I hoped that God had given me an interest in flying for a reason. . . . With God, girls can fly!" God helped and enabled her.

Because she has come to Jesus first to quench her thirst, others say this—Tammie Jo is "almost too impossibly caring, too impossibly devoted to her community; a role model. She volunteers to help at-risk kids; she and her husband took in victims of Hurricane Rita and widows who have need. She gives her resources and talents because 'everything she has she's been given from God, so she wants to share it.'²

That's the mark of the Holy Spirit, a mark that also shines in you when you turn to Jesus and seek the Holy Spirit. You, too, will show Jesus' heart toward others.

Give him a chance and then keep a journal of how Jesus quenches your thirst each day. He will encourage you. When you are discouraged, go back and read it. You will see the Holy Spirit in you, feeding you and making you fruitful.

But some, like the Pharisees, use religion to control others. They looked down on the crowd as inferior for not knowing the law. They never celebrated a victory of faith. They tried to control Jesus from healing on the Sabbath, and disregarded his teaching. Their hearts were not open. They desired only to control others and God.

What do you choose? What you can control? Or the Truth? It looks like an easy choice, but it really is not. Let's understand the problem. Isaiah said: as we do our work, we find ourselves creating an idol. It's easier to feel okay through ambition, money, possessions, or a political party—those gods are our idols out of which we seek satisfaction. But they will never satisfy. As Isaiah says, when we build idols rather than a relationship with God, "The poor, deluded fool feeds on ashes. He trusts something that can't help him at all. Yet he cannot bring himself to ask, "Is this idol that I'm holding in my hand a lie?" (44:20).

That's the question that divided the people then and still divides people today. But Jesus stood and shouted out and he shouts out to you today,

"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. The one who believes in me, even as the Scripture says, 'Out of his belly will flow rivers of living water.'" He said this about the Spirit" (John 7:37-39a),

Give Jesus a chance and you'll find Truth that overcomes all your dryness, and as Isaiah says, "with joy you shall draw water out of the wells of salvation." (12:3)

AMEN

² Melissa Repko, "Pilot's reaction: 'God is Good'," Dallas Morning News front page, section A, April 19, 2018.