

Sunday October 22, 2023

Lesson 7: The Biggest Spring in the World

Scripture: John 7: 32-44

Context:

Today we continue our fall curriculum, “God Provides.” The second unit is titled “Living Water,” with several lessons of how God’s providence comes in the form of water, a simultaneous chaotic and replenishing element. Today’s lesson comes from the gospel of John, one of the firsthand accounts of Jesus in his ministry. The focus of today’s lesson will be to discover how we can embrace Jesus as the living water, as he provides all we need.

Of the four gospels to give accounts of Jesus’ life, the gospel of John is the one which contains a high Christology. Jesus knows who he is and what he came to do; he was the Messiah sent on a mission. This gospel account also contains Jesus going to Jerusalem three different times. Each time he goes, there is a stir and a commotion.

In today’s encounter, Jesus has caught the attention of the chief priests and the Pharisees as they send Temple police to arrest him. Jesus then gives them a play on words where he asserts they will not be able to see him in a little bit as he is going to the Father and a place they cannot go. He is showing some of his identity: all attempts to lay ahold of him will fail unless they start with some sense of his uniqueness as one sent from above.¹ Even still, the language is strange to those who hear it.

The individuals gathered are perplexed. They query about him going off to teach the Greeks of the diaspora. In the Greek-speaking Jewish world of John, some Jews would have been much more at ease consigning to the pagan world the kind of thought the Gospel represented.² Thus, we begin to see how there are conflicted understandings of Jesus and his identity.

On the last day of the festival, Jesus shares even more about his identity. Most biblical scholars peg this festival’s timing as *Sukkoth*, a water-libation ceremony of the seventh day to fit with Jesus’ message of him being the one for all who thirst to come and be filled.³ Even then, Jesus goes on to say this experience is tied to the Spirit and to his experience of “glorification.” After Jesus’ glorification, this gift of water will give life, but not until then.

When Jesus says these words, there is even more talk of his identity. Some proclaim him as a prophet, placing him with the likes of Moses. Others question if he is the Messiah, a title foretold by other prophets. Yet there is a disconnect as Jesus hails from Galilee and all lines of prophecy connect the Davidic line to the city of Bethlehem. As a result of these prophecies

¹ Sloan, Gerard. “John,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 90.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 91.

questions, there is division and uproar in the crowd. Some want to arrest him, yet there is no arrest and Jesus continues on his way.

Application

The passage we read today is full of moments where people try to figure out the identity of Jesus for what he offers them now and for the future. His identity even becomes a source of controversy as people try to figure out whether he is the role of prophet or the Messiah. Yet the words of Jesus remain for those who hear him; he is the living water and the Spirit will nourish those who continue to come to him.

We read this passage set in Jerusalem, the city where Jesus spends little of his ministry and yet it also plays a pivotal role as it will be the place where he is betrayed, arrested, condemned, crucified, and then rise from the dead. As we see, the city is religiously significant and thus we pay attention to all the players from the scribes to the questioning crowds. Yet the words of Jesus are cryptic with an underlying focus to come to him when one seeks living water to be nourished and refreshed.

I find this passage highly appropriate as often we read passages such as these and much like the crowds, we have all the questions about Jesus and what he came to do then, as well as what he will do now. Who will Jesus save? What prophecies does he fulfill, and which ones will he come later to fulfill? How does it all fit together, both the Bible and Jesus as the Lord and Savior we know?

This past week, we saw the horrific attacks of the Hamas militant group against Israeli citizens and one could collectively feel even the tension among the Christian community on what this means. It is scary to think about a place we consider as the Holy Land as beset by tension and violence, the blood of innocent children and people being shed because of centuries of unrest. Lest we get into a panic and start pulling out random verses from the book of Revelation to lay out the formula of what will happen next, I think we are called to return to the words Jesus gives here about the nature of his identity and what he offers and promises us.

In this case, Jesus makes clear no one fully has the answers. The chief priests and scribes do not know all the things, nor do the crowds. You even see among the crowd competing knowledge of the scriptures and where Jesus fits into them. So often, we too like putting Jesus into a box, particularly a box where we know we are in and perhaps others are out or wrong. It comforts us to think we have all the answers, the grand plan right at our disposal.

Yet when I read this passage, I am humbled by what Jesus says. He is the living water and it only he who has all the answers and all the nourishment we need. Anyone who comes to him will be nourished and all are invited to come and receive from him. Yet what he also states is how the Spirit will be the one to lead believers to testify about this water he gives.

When I think of the Spirit, my mind immediately goes to the fruit of the Spirit mentioned by Paul in the book of Galatians. God speaks through Paul to give the Galatians what they need as they search for what it means to follow Christ. They are to be filled with the Spirit which gives them love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. This is the way the followers of Jesus are filled to act in times of both certainty and uncertainty, trusting he will sort out all the rest.

As I have both taught and preached the Old Testament and the New Testament in the

local church and at a college, I continued to be marveled at the new things the Spirit reveals to me. There's a story I missed or had forgotten. The theme of Covenant in the Old Testament connects to the theme of Resurrection in the New Testament. I learned how the Book of Revelation is not a book of gloom and doom with a master list of end time events as it is more a book of worship and a focus on Jesus as the living water who never ends. And the list goes on and on at how Jesus always wants to teach me something.

These experiences lead to me to believe the most prudent things Christians can do when we do not have the answers is to trust in Jesus, the living water. While anxiety and concern and perhaps even trepidation of the future hang there, I am reminded of how Paul spoke to the early Christians when Jesus hadn't returned to remember the fruit of the Spirit and to focus on the here and now. I am reminded of the Book of Revelation, a book of worship and hope, about how God is the Alpha and the Omega and the message John was given to tell the church was to look brightly to the future, not the end of Christendom. I trust over time Jesus will reveal things as he will. And for me, right here and right now, I am called to place my hope in the One who came not to condemn the world but offer eternal life.

I hope in the days ahead we as Christians do the things God encourages us to do: to pray for an end to violence, to pray for families in the Middle East, to pray for world leaders, and for us to see our corner of the kingdom as the place where Jesus needs us to love, serve, and worship him. I hope we continue to trust in him, and study the Word with both reverence and humility, willing to be surprised or challenged. And I hope we continue to worship God, seeing that in the Creeds, the hymns/praise songs, the table of Holy Communion, and the Word proclaimed we have the living water of Jesus who comes to us again and again.

How have you seen a childlike faith in Jesus lead to a sense of hope and encouragement? What fruit of the Spirit do you see in other Christians? Why do you think Jesus wants there to be an air of mystery about his identity? How has Jesus rocked your world? How has Jesus brought you peace? Where in your life is Jesus inviting you to yield to him?

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