

John 7:1-52

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Preacher: David Helm

[0:00] Good morning. My name is Jeremy White. I serve as co-director of youth ministry here at Holy Trinity Church.

If you are a child three years old through second grade, you may walk quietly to the back of the auditorium and meet your teachers for class. Parents, there is a nursery for children ages zero through two available throughout the service.

Please remember to pick up your children at their classrooms when the service ends. Our scripture reading today is taken from the book of John, chapter 7, though for this morning we will just be reading through verses 1 to 14 and 37 through 39.

This can be found in the White Bibles provided on page 989. Please remain standing for the reading of God's Word. After this, Jesus went about in Galilee.

He would not go about in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill him. Now the Jews' feast of booths was at hand. So his brothers said to him, Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing.

[1:08] For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world. For not even his brothers believed in him. Jesus said to them, My time has not yet come, but your time is always here.

The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it. That its works are evil. You go up to the feast. I am not going up to the feast, for my time has not yet fully come. After saying this, he remained in Galilee.

But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly, but in private.

The Jews were looking for him at the feast and saying, Where is he? And there was much muttering about him among the people.

While some said, He is a good man, others said, No, he is leading the people astray. Yet for the fear of the Jews, no one spoke openly of him. About the middle of the feast, Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching.

Verses 37 through 39. 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.

[2:10] Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those believed in him were to receive. For as yet the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet been glorified. This is the word of the Lord.

You may be seated. You may be seated. Let me add my greetings.

We're glad that you're here. And pray that these Sundays, week by week, will be a source of great encouragement to you. William Shakespeare placed on the lips of Joan Lapucella, a literary line that lays nicely over this part of John's gospel.

Here's what she says following the death of Henry VI. Glory is like a circle in the water, which never ceaseth to enlarge itself, till by broad spreading it disperses to naught.

So it was with Jesus as well. By the time chapter 7 opens, that glory that he had like a circle in the water, how was it that John put it in chapter 1?

[3:54] A glory that came from the Father. And we had seen that fullness, grace upon grace, had enlarged itself through the healing of individuals, through his testimony concerning his own self as the Christ to the woman at the well, to the healing of an official son, to the last two weeks, the feeding of 5,000 people.

The glory of Christ, by the close of chapter 6, had swelled all the way till it dispersed to naught. Take a look at 7.1.

The Jesus is now in Galilee, some six months after the feeding of the 5,000, and the Jews are seeking to kill him.

I've been thinking of this moment in John's Gospel, almost framing all of chapter 6, this phrase, a collapse of epic proportion.

from 5,000 to 12, from the street cred of feeding many, to his incredulous sermon that pulled everyone back away from him.

[5 : 21] It was the preaching ministry of Jesus that was so repulsive and inglorious that all of the world had left him.

And now, for some, they want him dead. For the multitudes, he is already as good as dead to them. And here's the wonderful surprise of chapter 7.

Jesus suddenly is resurrected long before his death through John's writing. The one who had only 11 is by the close of the chapter having all of the people again interested in who he is.

I mean, I don't know if you've taken a look at the way this is written, but he appears to be a preacher with nine lives. He's been dismissed by all, but he's the subject of everyone's conversation.

The chapter is chock full of people. And they are colliding like commuters on a crowded L train.

[6 : 33] And the topic of discussion is what am I to make of Jesus? I mean, just throw your eyes down through chapter 7 as I walk through it. The brothers who disbelieve him are challenging him.

The Jews continue to look for him. The people are muttering about him. Others will be marveling at him, rejecting him, seeking to arrest him.

Some will outright reject him, while others think that the Christ is now among them. And it will close with everyone scurrying home to gather their Hebrew scriptures to see if this Jesus is the Christ that was promised to come to them.

I mean, it is a literary masterpiece, a cacophony of sound that places the reader on the streets of Jerusalem within earshot of all of the things that are being said about Jesus.

Two questions emerge. What am I to make of Jesus? Jesus? And what is it about Jesus wherein he just won't die?

[7 : 54] Those are the questions, I think, to frame this morning from the chapter. What am I to make of Jesus? And what is it about Jesus that just fails to die?

If you think about the second one, the second question, at least from this chapter, the answer is connected to his relationship to this feast and celebration called the Feast of the Booths.

Let me show you just how that chapter is organized. I mean, Jeremy read it for you this morning in order to highlight the movement of the text. Verse 2, Now the Jews' feast of booths was at hand.

And that at-handness of the feast carried the writer through verse 13 until he moves you, verse 14, about the middle of the feast.

Jesus went up to begin teaching. And then, verse 37, on the last day of the feast, the great day. And with those three literary markers all concerning the Feast of Booths, John is relaying to us through his organization somehow what we are to make of his ongoing influence.

[9 : 16] Why he doesn't die on the pages of history. So, if you don't know anything about the Feast of Booths, you're not alone today. So, let's just start there.

I mean, some sermons need to exhort and cheer and cajole, but there's an element in sermons where you just need something understood, right? We have to explain something.

Let me just explain what the Feast of Booths is. It emerged for the first time on the pages of Scripture back in Leviticus 23 and is reiterated in Numbers 29.

It was an eight-day-long festival of sorts and it took place annually in the city of Jerusalem.

It was commemorating or celebrating God's gracious provision to Israel for his manna and his water during the 40 years of wandering.

[10 : 20] Now, you may not be familiar with this, but we live in a Jewish neighborhood here that large numbers of people in this next week for next Sunday marks the Feast of Booths, the beginning of this festival again.

And in my own condominium, there will be Orthodox Jews or there have been over the years that if I go down into the basement and I look into the storage areas or the bins, there will be erected in the basement of my own dwelling a booth, a small house made of branches.

And what the Feast of Booths was, was for a week, it was like an outdoor festival where everyone would come to Jerusalem, they would pitch their tents, and they would sleep under them to commemorate God took care of us when we had nothing.

He provided bread every day when I had not a dime and water where there was none even from a rock. Such was and is the Feast of Booths.

Notice verse 14. Jesus arrives in the middle of it. Probably day four or so.

[11:46] I don't want you just to know what the Feast was, but I want you to know how it would have felt if you and I had been there. It was religious, but it wasn't one of these high holy days that puts all of a worshiping community into this moroseful moment of self-reflection, self-condemnation, a hunting back upon my sin, a sense of wanting to make a new start.

No, the Feast of Booths was like a street festival that you might see in this country even at a different time of year like in Mardi Gras.

It was festive. It was celebratory. It was one of thanksgiving. It was one of feasting.

It was one of thanksgiving. It was one of saying, I cannot believe what God has done for us in the past.

I woke up again today. There's food on my table, drink to be had, and it was a festive celebration.

And part of what would happen at the Feast of Booths is you would have somebody, the priest would, from Deuteronomy 31, they would begin teaching in the temple and people would be reconnecting with God through all of his good promises having been made.

[13:22] So here comes Jesus in the midst of the party, a block festival, a week-long taste, as it were. And there he begins teaching, much like Ezra did of old when they recovered the scriptures and learned how to offer these feasts once again.

Nehemiah, chapter 7 and verse 8, says that they were in the midst of the seventh month and the people had come to the water gate and they had recovered the law and all of a sudden everyone comes to hear the word of the Lord.

In the festivity of the week, Jesus now almost functioning like an Ezra of old, holding forth on the word, supplanting, I am sure, those who felt it was their responsibility to lead the people in celebration.

Did you know that in Nehemiah 8 and 9, when they recover this feast celebration of the booths, the people were mourning because they were learning from the law that they were sinful.

Not ever a fun thing to do. But they were so moved that they wanted to mourn. And guess what the leaders said, the rabbis, the teacher, they said, whoa, whoa, time out, time out.

[14:46] Now is not the day for you to be crying about your sins. This is the feast of booths week. There's a time in one's life where the self-flagellation over the knowledge of sin needs to be set aside so that one would remember all the good that God did.

Because if you don't stop to remember his goodness and his provision, it almost functions as an affront to his kindness. And so this is the festive mood in which Jesus is now speaking like Ezra of old, giving thanks before the people from the scriptures concerning all the things that God has provided.

What is the feast? That eight day long commemoration. How would it have felt to be among the feast? It would have felt like the middle of summer in Chicago traveling from neighborhood to neighborhood with the aromas on the street just as there were multiple sacrifices in the city and everyone in gratitude to God for giving us bread in our past and water to remain alive.

Verse 37 on the last day of the feast. Notice comma the great day. The last day of the feast, we're not going to look to Leviticus 23 to see what it is or Nehemiah to feel what it might have been like. If you want to know what was happening on the last day of the feast, you've got to turn to something called the Mishnah. The what you say? The Mishnah I answer. The Mishnah is a collection of writings that were assembled together somewhere between 2 BCE and 2 CE, a 400 year period, where Jewish rabbis are writing about their religious practice.

[16:56] In the Mishnah, there is a tractate that talks about the feast of the booths. And in that tractate, it begins to explain what would happen on the different days.

Catch this. There was something called the water libation that would last for seven days. The priest would go to the water gate, to the pool of Siloam.

He would take a golden flagon, if that's pronounced correctly, he would dip it into the water, and he would carry it from the water gate with thousands of people around him, all the way across to Herod's temple.

And it was a celebration of the water that God provided in the midst of the wilderness, from the rock, the provision of God. The tractate goes on to say that he would have to lift it high because the

people told him, lift up thine hand, so as he would not spill it.

And then it goes on to say that he would enter into the moment of place where all the people are gathered. The people would be having a citrus fruit in their right hand, a palm branch in their left hand, singing great is the steadfast love of the Lord, and the water would come from this gold pitcher, as it were, into a basin, and it would then be dropped like a circle in the water and spread and be dispersed.

[18 : 37] It was the high water mark of the whole week. In light of that, read verse 37 again, 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. I don't know if he did it at that exact moment, but it's not hard for me to envision.

The streets are filled with thousands of people. The high priest is in his robes. he's carried water, emblematic of God's providing for his own people, all the way to the main part of the temple.

He's lifted it over his head. The people are now silent. The water falls into the circle, begins to spread, and from somewhere in the vicinity is a voice.

Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.

[20 : 14] Why does Jesus not die? This is why. God claims to be to the world what God was to Israel in the wilderness.

He claimed, last chapter, to be the bread that came from heaven, and now in this chapter, the water, the spirit that is, that would bring life.

This Jesus is saying, I am the fulfillment of that Christ, that Messiah, that God, who gives you life. Stunning! No wonder they leave afterwards wondering, who is this man? Some, he's got to be a prophet.

Others, this has got to be the Christ. Others, but does the Christ come from Galilee? Others, we don't try a man without knowing him. You too, go home, every one of you, read your scriptures.

[21 : 35] Is it possible that this Jesus is that Christ? Christ, is he the one that is, that is, in his own person, the feast of booths?

Is he the one under whom you take shelter and find sustenance of life? Charles Mallet said that he could live without bread, he could live without water, he could live without air, but he could not live without Jesus.

Is Jesus life? Does he give us his spirit? What do you make of Jesus?

This relationship, John writes in verse 39, that this sermon by Jesus, this two sentence sermon, was indicative about something that he says 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.

That the waters of life that are given to you through Christ are inseparable from the spirit of the living God, who will give you life everlasting.

[23 : 00] Now, this relationship between the spirit and water is as old as the initial verses of the Bible, wherein we read that the spirit of the Lord is hovering over the waters.

In the garden of Eden, there are four rivers that in a sense are going forth from the very tabernacle presence of God out to the ends of the earth. In Ezekiel's prophecy, there are four rivers, the water itself, emblematic of the spirit of God that will give life to the end of the age.

In Revelation, it will also indicate that in the garden, the new creation, there are rivers that flow forth from the throne, giving life. That the spirit of God is the very water of God.

And that the water that is emblematic of his spirit. And when you really consider this, I was moved as I had been reading the Nehemiah account again of the moment when the feast of booze was re-celebrated.

And in chapter 9, verse 19 and 20, we read, God, you gave your good spirit to instruct them and do not withhold your manna from their mouth and you gave them water for their thirst.

[24 : 20] Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell. But notice the connection. God, you gave them your spirit.

How did he give them his spirit? Through his provision. And now Jesus says, I am the provision of God for you.

If you're understanding this, then you're entering into an eight-day festival of immense gratitude and thanksgiving.

you're entering into a moment where you kind of lay your sin aside for a moment and you declare that I am to rejoice that God in Jesus gives me life.

That in Jesus I can make my way through the wilderness of this world. That in Jesus all of my problems will be met. that I can have nothing.

[25 : 26] Yea, I can die and yet live. I cannot eat and yet be full. I don't have to drink to have life.

Because if I have Jesus, I have the life of God, life itself that came into the world. So, could this be what Jesus had in mind in Isaiah 55 where he said, come, buy, drink, without cost.

I'm going to shut it down. Not under the words of Shakespeare because some of you don't like Shakespeare, that's fine. So, I'm going to close down on Emmylou Harris.

Some of you are like, who's Emmylou Harris? Okay, we'll come back next week, we'll try somebody else for you. What a song. When she wrote, the sun burned hot, it burned my eyes, burned so hot I thought I'd die, thought I'd died and gone to hell, looking for the water from a deeper well.

I went to the river, the river was dry, I fell to my knees, looked up to the sky, I looked to the sky, and the spring rain fell. I saw the water from a deeper well.

[27 : 03] Well, looking for the water from a deeper well. If you are looking for water that will satisfy into everlasting life, you are looking for Jesus.

Pitch your tent under his provision and let the celebration begin. Our heavenly father, we now come to the table, another sign, another sign of bread and drink that is emblematic of our lord and his provision for us.

May all who have faith enjoy partaking in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.