



THE SATISFYING SPIRIT

John 4:3-15, 7:37-39

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This is the second in a series of sermons on the Holy Spirit. Previously we considered the pioneering work of the Spirit in a person's life, which involves opening our eyes to see Christ crucified, and to believe what the Scriptures teach, that he died *for us*. We learned about this from reading Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus in John 3, in which Jesus said that we must be *reborn* to enter the Kingdom of God. Being reborn is something we can't do ourselves. It has to happen to us. And that's the first and foremost ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives: pushing us through a spiritual birth canal into new life as children of God.

So what happens next? What do babies want after they're born? They're thirsty, right? In much the same way, we're all spiritually thirsty. And whether we know it or not, the only thing that will truly quench our thirst is the Holy Spirit. That's what we'll learn more about in this sermon.

THIRST.

Among our newcomers during worship here at Church of the Resurrection last Sunday were three young adults who were so warmly welcomed by our church that they felt free to pinch several wallets while they were here. It turns out that special guests matching their description have recently made sticky-fingered visits to at least three other churches on Capitol Hill. What's so frustrating about this crime is that it strikes at the core of who we are and what we do, i.e. we're a Christian missionary outpost here on the Hill, and we welcome in strangers. We're good at it. We love to welcome people in and make them feel at home.

The most painful thing about last Sunday wasn't the loss, but how they mocked us while they stole from us. While one of these guests was going through purses in one room, her accomplice was sucking on a giant Starbucks cup, laughing at those who were engaging her to make her feel at home. I've been thinking about that young woman and her Starbucks cup all week. It's become an emblem of the insatiable thirst that we all have in common. Our sticky-fingered guests may have had any number of motives, whether genuine poverty, or boredom, or otherwise. But in any case, they were thirsty for money and willing to steal from multiple churches, risking arrest and imprisonment, in order to be satisfied.

We're all a lot more like these thieves than we'd like to admit. We're so thirsty that we'll try almost anything to quench it. This week in Dupont Circle I overheard a young woman on her cell phone, now sobbing, now accusing, now pleading with her lover. For five years she had given her body to him, waiting for him to love her in return. But all he had done was use and betray her, again and again. I felt so deeply for this complete stranger, knowing that she has the very same thirst that we all have in common.

The reason we don't recognize it is because our common thirst is hidden in plain view. We all have different desires, and we try to satisfy these desires in so many different ways that we miss the underlying fact of thirst. We're in the universal fellowship of the thirsty.

Think for a moment about how you may have tried to quench your own thirst this week. What has captivated your heart, your thoughts, your finances? Is it a new gadget? furniture? clothes? Is it relational, whether love or sex or revenge or power? Have you watched every beautiful woman or man that walked by you this week? Maybe it's actual food and drink? Whether healthy or greasy, sweet or alcoholic, or perhaps even a giant Starbucks like our accomplice last Sunday? Or maybe you don't even know—maybe you just keep refreshing your inbox and Facebook and Twitter over and over again, from early in the morning until late at night, waiting for something significant or meaningful, hoping for any new possibility that might satisfy. If the giant Starbucks is an appropriate contemporary *emblem* for our thirst, then certainly the posture of our fellowship of the thirsty is bent, peering into a little screen, scrolling and refreshing. Everywhere we look, whether on the metro or on the Mall, people are hunched and scrolling, checking and waiting. We're all thirsty.

ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE

WHAT YOU THINK IT LOOKS LIKE:



WHAT IT ACTUALLY LOOKS LIKE:



The problem is that we're looking the wrong way. Instead of looking down, we should be looking up. The great pastor and theologian, St. Augustine, begins his autobiographical *Confessions* by praying, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you." Augustine is acknowledging what he learned by experience through a lifetime of looking in the wrong places. Only God will satisfy our thirst.

Like Augustine, Blaise Pascal lived for many years as a religious skeptic, experimenting with many pleasures, and searching for the truth. He was also a brilliant philosopher, mathematician and scientist. As a young man, through his experiments with water pressure, Pascal overturned the prevailing theory that a vacuum was impossible in nature. Later in life, through the writings of St. Augustine, Pascal came to meet Jesus and have his heart filled by God. So Pascal, after having gained notoriety for proving that vacuums are possible and actually exist in nature, wrote this gem that was discovered after his death: "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every person, and it can never be filled by any created thing. It can only be filled by God, made known through Jesus Christ."

The contention of the Bible is that our thirst comes from an internal, spiritual vacuum, and that sin drives us to try to fill that hole any and every way apart from God. Much of the Old Testament speaks to our thirst and our misdirected efforts to try to satisfy it. But it also holds out this hope: that someday God will fill it in a dramatic and perfect way. A day will come when God quenches our thirst with himself. For example, Psalm 42 is both a vivid poetic description of this deep sense of longing, as well as a reminder to keep looking to God to satisfy. The Psalmist repeatedly describes his emptiness within, while professing a faith that God will fill it, and a commitment to keep praising God in the interim. Likewise, Isaiah 12 offers the hope that some day, God's people will draw water from the wells of salvation, and then they will sing and shout and proclaim God's praises. These Old Testament expectations lay the backdrop for Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4.

SATISFACTION

Much is made of the fact that Jesus and the Samaritan woman are different ethnicities and different religions. But they also had a lot in common. Most significantly, both believed that God would someday give of himself in order to quench our insatiable thirst. That's why at the end of their conversation the woman said to Jesus, "I know that Messiah, the Christ, is coming" (John 4:25). They shared the expectation that the Messiah would bring God's living water.

Reading their conversation from the beginning of John 4, I'm not quite sure what we should read into the interplay between Jesus and the woman. Is it hostile or flirtatious? On the one hand, as many, many commentators have pointed out over the years, and as the woman herself points out in 4:9, there's great animosity between Jews and Samaritans. Jesus is no ordinary foreigner. No, he's Jewish, and the same kind of animosity that we see today between Hamas and Israel was present between these two ethnicities then. Certainly if this had been an encounter between two ordinary men, a Samaritan and a Jew, then we should read it as antagonistic.

But this is a meeting between a man and a woman. And not just at any old place—it's at a well. The well in the ancient world is like the bar of today, where men try out their best pick-up lines and "dreams come true." A lot of famous romances begin in the Old Testament, including that of Jacob and Rachel, which we'll talk about more in a moment.

The man at the well is also not just any man, but Jesus, who we can presume would not have been hostile because of his peace-making character. Likewise, this is not just any woman, but one who has been very promiscuous for that time. In 4:18, we discover that she has had five husbands, and is currently in a relationship with a sixth man who is not her husband. And now she's talking with another man, a stranger from the upper caste of the Jews. He approaches her at the well and asks her for a drink (4:7). Is Jesus her lucky number seven? If so, then her response in 4:9 is not hostile but flirtatious and suggestive. "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" Wink, wink.

In any case, her question opens the door for Jesus to speak directly to her deepest need, the one that she has unsuccessfully tried to meet by cycling through one man after another. Jesus says (4:10), "If you knew who you were talking to (i.e. 'the gift of God'-John 3:16), you would be asking me for a drink of living water instead."

When we hear "living water," it sounds a bit like Jesus has been working with a 1980's marketing firm to rebrand his ministry. But from a historical perspective, actually no one would have found this term particularly "spiritual." Living water was simply how they spoke about potable water back then. People would dig cisterns near their homes in order to collect rain water that could then be used for watering crops or bathing. But fresh water for drinking, i.e. "living water," had to come from a clean source like a spring or a well.

What this means is that the woman takes Jesus at face value. She understands him to be saying, simply, that *he* could give *her* drinking water. This raises a very practical question that she poses in 4:11: "Given that you have no rope and bucket, how do you plan to draw this water out?" I've been to this very well in the West Bank, and it is indeed still more than a hundred feet deep. The woman's question is a good one.

In 4:12 she asks a follow-up question, into which people often read ethnic hostility: "Are *you* greater than *our* father Jacob? He gave *us* the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." This hostile reading supposes that the woman is arguing for her own legitimacy as a descendant of Jacob. However, there was never any debate over ancestry. Everyone knew that both Samaritans and Jews were descended from Jacob. Why would she say such a thing? What if she was talking about something else? What if, in mentioning "our father Jacob," she was talking about the ancient story of Jacob the Jew who fell in love with a beautiful foreign maiden he met at a well? (Genesis 29) As in John 4, Jacob had come from far away, and he came to a well at the same time, in the heat of the day. This time the well was covered by a large stone. But when Jacob saw the beautiful Rachel, he was overcome with passion. Suddenly he exploded with strength and rolled away the stone all by himself. If there was any story Samaritan women knew about Jacob, it was probably this one. So I'm inclined to read her question in a more suggestive and flirtatious manner: "Are you *greater* than our father Jacob? He gave us this well." What are you going to give me? Wink. Wink.

Jesus, however, doesn't get sidetracked. His response is a lot more than she expected. In vv 13-14, Jesus reveals that "living water" is indeed a play on words, and much more than simply potable water. He says, "Whoever drinks of *this* water (i.e. from Jacob's well) will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst again because it will become within a spring of water welling up to eternal life." What water is Jesus talking about? What could he be offering that will truly quench our insatiable thirst?

Jesus only implies the answer in the rest of this passage, as he talks with the woman about her many husbands, and then they talk about worship. All this talk is really on the same subject, as Jesus keeps the focus on how she has tried unsuccessfully to fill the vacuum inside her. Only at the end does Jesus become a bit more direct. She says to him, "I know that Messiah, the Christ, will come." And Jesus replies in 26: "I who speak to you am he."

Thankfully this isn't the end of what Jesus has to say on this topic. When he returns to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, he brings it up again: He 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.'" John 7:37-38. Then John provides an enormously helpful explanatory note: "This he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive." John 7:39

Given what we've read in these two passages, we can now say:

- We're thirsty, and we'll try almost anything to quench it.
- But only the living water that Jesus gives can satisfy. It fills the vacuum, finding a home in our hearts.
- Once we drink of that water, it becomes a spring within us, welling up to eternal life.
- And finally, as John tells us, this internal fountain is none other than the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus gives to every believer.

Don't you want this gift? In John 3, Nicodemus never asks Jesus to be born again. Rather, he fades back into the darkness. In John 4, however, the Samaritan woman says, "Sir, give me this water," and by the end of the story it appears that he has. If you know that God hasn't filled the vacuum inside you, all you have to do is ask. The Samaritan woman's prayer is a great one: "Lord, give me this water." You can rest assured that he will.

FULLNESS

The New Testament primarily uses two terms to describe the ministry of the Holy Spirit within us. It's important that we be able to distinguish between them. The first is the "*baptism of the Holy Spirit*," which describes what happens whenever we put our faith in Jesus. All but one of the references to the baptism of the Holy Spirit occur in the Gospels and at the beginning of Acts, and they point forward to the Day of Pentecost, when the promised Holy Spirit was initially poured out on the church. On that day, the eleven surviving disciples, Mary and all the women, and presumably Nicodemus if he was there with them, all received the gift of the Spirit. From that point on, whoever else trusted in Jesus also received the baptism of the Holy Spirit as well. Consequently Paul writes decades later to the entire Corinthian church (Greece) and says, "We

have all been baptized in one Spirit into one body—both Jews and Greeks, slaves and free—and all made to drink of one Spirit.” (1 Cor 12:13). This is great news, because it means that we who weren’t alive at the first Pentecost didn’t miss out. It doesn’t matter when or where you were born, it doesn’t matter what class or ethnicity or religion your parents—if you put your faith in Jesus Christ, he will baptize you with his Holy Spirit.

The second term the New Testament uses is the “*filling of the Holy Spirit*.” This expression describes what happens whenever we devote or yield ourselves more fully to God. Jesus was the first person to be described in this way, but then there were others, e.g. the first Christian martyr, Stephen, then Barnabas, etc. This is why Paul writes what he does to the Ephesian Christians, who have all been baptized in the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:4-5). He calls them to devote themselves to God more and more, so that they may be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18).

What this tells us is that the first term, the “*baptism of the Holy Spirit*,” is about Christian initiation. It is not a reference to the Christian sacrament of baptism; rather, the Christian sacrament of baptism is a reference to it. In other words, Christian baptism is an outward sign of what the Scriptures teach happens to every person who is born again, namely, that the Holy Spirit takes up residence within the God-shaped vacuum of our hearts.

Meanwhile the second term, the “*filling of the Holy Spirit*,” is about life after Christian initiation. It speaks to Jesus’ promise to the Samaritan woman. How will we never thirst again? By regularly drinking from that fountain, and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

We can illustrate this distinction many ways. Think, for example, of marriage. There’s the official declaration of marriage that happens during the wedding service. “I pronounce you man and wife.” That’s the baptism of marriage, if you will. Then there’s the filling of the marriage by practicing what’s been promised, to care for one another for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, ‘til death us do part. To receive the official declaration but then never practice the promises isn’t much of a marriage, is it? On the other hand, marriages in which both partners practice their promises are immensely satisfying.

Likewise, think of church membership. There’s the official declaration of membership that comes from joining the church. In effect, the new member declares, “I love this church and am committing myself to her.” But there’s a difference between declaration and participation. The latter involves actively loving the church, whether through praying for one another, or attending worship and a small group, serving in ministry, giving financially, taking meals to people in need, etc. The joy and satisfaction of the church comes from our participation in it.

Our relationship with God is the same. When we believe, we are baptized into the Holy Spirit. From that day forward, for the rest of time, we seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 5 is all about this, all about “walking in love,” as Paul calls it. By this he means living out the love that we have professed. In different ways throughout Ephesians 5, Paul calls us to clear out the brush and debris in our hearts, i.e. whatever vestiges remain of the old junk we brought in trying to fill the vacuum. Instead, we are to discern what is pleasing to the Lord (5:10). Don’t try to fill your heart with wine, or porn, or shopping, or success (5:18). You know these won’t satisfy.

Rather, be filled (or perhaps more accurately, keep on being filled) with the Holy Spirit.¹ And as Jesus said, “out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks,” so in the same way as you’re filled with the Holy Spirit, (5:19) you will overflow with Scripture and hymns to God and praise songs. Why? Because you love God, and this is one of the best ways to express your love for him.

Let’s pray regularly for the Lord to fill us with the Holy Spirit. There is no shame in asking for this. The way God made the universe is that it’s always in motion; we’re always experiencing ebb and flow. There’s night & day, summer & winter, work & rest. In the Christian life, as in marriage & church membership, there are seasons of better & worse, richer & poorer, sickness & health. We’re filled with the Holy Spirit, and then not so much.² Whatever the reason behind our need, the need is nevertheless there. We need to be filled and refilled with the Holy Spirit. Let’s ask the Lord for this, that we all might find increasing satisfaction in him.

¹ Paul writes here in the 2nd person plural: “Don’t you (plural) get drunk on wine, but do you (plural) be filled with the Holy Spirit.” See what a difference this makes? Being filled with the Holy Spirit is something we do in harness together as a church, and together we are satisfied. Our joy and satisfaction together transcend the sum of our parts.

² The 19th C American evangelist Dwight Moody put it simply this way: “we leak.”