

**SCRIPTURE TEXT:** John 7:37-39

**SERMON TITLE:** And the Rivers Flow

This morning's scripture lesson is from John 7:37-39. The setting for this text is the Jewish Festival of Tabernacles or Booths. This was a week-long agricultural celebration that remembered the time when the Hebrew people lived in tents as they wandered in the wilderness after their deliverance from bondage in Egypt. During the Festival, people would build little booths made out of tree branches to recall that wilderness experience.

But the Festival also involved water. On each day of the observance, a Temple priest took a golden pitcher down to the Pool of Siloam and filled it with water. The pitcher was carried back to the Temple through the Water Gate while the people recited Isaiah 12:3: *With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.* The water was taken to the altar of the Temple. The people processed around the altar waving in one hand a lemon or citron as a sign of the harvest, and in the other hand, twigs and a palm branch bound together to signify the tabernacles. When the procession was over, the priest poured the water over the altar as an offering to God. Can't you just picture the water flowing down the altar?

All of these sacred actions were filled with meaning. They were an enacted prayer for rain since this was an agricultural festival; they were a powerful remembrance of God's provision of water from the rock in the wilderness; and they stirred up anticipation for the coming of a Messiah who would open up a fountain of living waters flowing from Jerusalem.

So what does all of this have to do with the Holy Spirit? Well, notice how Jesus reinterprets the significance of water as we listen for the word of God. **SCRIPTURE LESSON.**

Water--flowing rivers--images used in this morning text to speak of the Holy Spirit and please notice that in this imaging of the Spirit there is no mighty sound of the rushing wind or

flames of fire as in the Pentecost story from Acts, in John its just water—quenching thirst—flowing in rivers.

And make no mistake about it, in this story Jesus stirred up the waters. I imagine him on his feet as the water is poured over the altar and crying out: *Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and let the one who believes in me drink.* This was a controversial proclamation—to say the least.

But in John's gospel, after Jesus was indeed glorified in death, the risen Christ appeared to his disciples, breathed on them, and they received the Holy Spirit—in other words, they drank the living water. And out of their hearts—the Greek literally says from out of their bellies—out of the inner most core of who they were—rivers of living water flowed.

And the rivers continue to flow. In fact, First United Methodist Church in Pflugerville exists because people have found in Christ the living water of the Spirit, and from their hearts, rivers of the Spirit have flowed.

For example, back in the early 1980s, some folks were thirsty for a United Methodist congregation in this community. Now usually in the United Methodist Church, the annual conference or another local church takes the initiative in giving birth to a new congregation—but not in Pflugerville. According to Carolyn and Emmett Eary, it was a woman named Shirley Shires who had the idea of forming a United Methodist congregation in Pflugerville—and she took the bull by the horns to get it done—motivated, no doubt, by the Holy Spirit. She talked up the idea; she put out a sign up sheet at Jim's convenience store over by what is now Timmerman Elementary School; George and Sandy Tolleson put out flyers; and before you know it, a group of interested folks met at Paul and Shirley Shires' home to start the process of forming a church.

The district played catch-up and sent a pastor named Ron Campbell to shepherd these folks. Worship services were held, first in the Anglican Church, and then in the Fire Hall. Sunday School was held for the kids in the Fire Hall while the adults went over to Marshall's Tavern for their study amidst the lingering smells of stale beer and cigarette smoke. On May 15, 1983, 95 people came forward to become the first members of First United Methodist Church in Pflugerville. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, from the hearts of these first members, rivers of living water have flowed. This is why we honor our past today.

And growing numbers of people thirsty for life have come to Christ through this congregation and had their thirst satisfied. After its first ten years, the membership of this church was 272. Twenty years later, the membership was 613. Today, our membership stands at 774 with every indication that we'll hit 800 members by the end of this year.

And the rivers continue to flow through the mission and ministry of our people. And we want to keep the rivers flowing. We desire to drink deeply of the Spirit ourselves as children, youth and adults—and we know that there are countless others beyond our fellowship who are still desperately thirsty for life. This is why we seek to build and remodel and renovate for the future—it's a means for keeping the rivers flowing so that all may come to Christ and drink of the Spirit and experience rivers of living water flowing from their hearts. This is the point of our capital stewardship campaign.

And today is Commitment Sunday. We've been in prayer; we've read the interpretive materials; we've listened to sermons; we've talked together; we've sought to discern the Spirit's direction—now its time to act and make our commitments.

Over these next few minutes we will have the opportunity to bring our pledge cards forward and place them on the altar. Feel free to kneel at the rail and be in prayer if you like. If

you didn't bring the pledge card that was mailed to many of you last week, additional cards have been provided in the bulletins and in the pews. This time is now yours to respond to the Spirit as the rivers flow.