

Text: John 7:37-39  
Pentecost Sunday, Year B  
20 May 2018  
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Jesus goes to a week-long festival in Jerusalem. And the Bible story we just read says that on the last day, the greatest day of the festival, Jesus stands up on the steps of the Temple in Jerusalem, because it was a religious festival and it was happening there, and Jesus *cries out* to the crowd, “Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. As Scripture says: *Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.*” The festival Jesus is at is the Festival of Booths – Jews still celebrate the Festival of Booths today; in the fall, if you drive by a synagogue you might see booths set up with palm branches on them. The Festival of Booths celebrates the 40 years the Jews were wandering in the Sinai wilderness on their way back to their homeland, Israel, being led by God. In Jesus’ day, every day of the Festival, water was carried in a golden pitcher from the Pool of Siloam, the pool of healing, as a reminder of the water that gushed from the rock in the desert when the Jews were dying of thirst and God told Moses to strike the rock face of a particular cliff and a torrent of water would flow out, saving them from death. In today’s story, on the last day of the Festival Jesus is attending, the greatest day of the Festival, as the golden pitcher filled with water is carried to the Temple steps, symbol of the life-giving water that saved the Jews in the desert, Jesus stands up and turns that symbol of life-giving water into reality. Jesus shouts out to the crowd, “Let anyone who thirsts come to *me* and drink.” Jesus is declaring himself to be the true water of life; he – Jesus – is the reality, not the symbol, not the memory. He – Jesus – is the water of life that can save our lives and, more than that, Jesus can make all who believe in him become channels of life, rivers of life, flowing out to others. Jesus calls us to drink of him by believing in him, and he promises us to be so filled with a transformed life, so filled with Jesus the water of life, that this life naturally will overflow out to others. Jesus says of those who believe in him, “*Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.*” What is this river of living water, this water of life? The Bible says it plainly: it is the Holy Spirit. When Jesus says, “*Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water,*” the Bible says, “Jesus said this about the Spirit that those who came to believe in him were to receive.” Jesus, who has the Spirit, promises to give us the Spirit and the new life that Jesus is going to bring about by his death, resurrection and ascension.

Jesus isn't the first to connect water with the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, using the prophet Isaiah, God promises "I will pour water on the thirsty land; I will pour my spirit upon your children." (*Isaiah 44*) And it is the Holy Spirit that is the power to change our lives into eternal lives, lives free from sin, the lives of the children of God. John explains this the opening verses of his Gospel, talking about the birth of the Son of God into our world as Jesus, when John says, "To all who believed in him, he gave power to become the children of God" - the power of the Holy Spirit bringing with it the life of Jesus to become our life, life to share with others - or, as Jesus puts it, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."

This is what we are celebrating at Pentecost today - that, as the completion of Jesus' Easter work, Jesus at last was able to send out the Spirit upon all of us who believe in him. When Jesus promised the Holy Spirit at the Festival of Booths, Jesus was not yet able to pass on the Spirit to us, because Jesus had not yet died, risen, and ascended into heaven. The Bible put it this way today, "There was, of course, no Spirit yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified." The Holy Spirit existed, of course, because the Holy Spirit has existed forever in the Trinity, but the Holy Spirit could not be given to us, and the gift the Holy Spirit brings us of a new life free from sin could not be given to us until Jesus had been glorified, until Jesus had died, risen and ascended into heaven and brought that new life into existence by his death. Pentecost - the sending out of the Holy Spirit - is the fulfillment of what Jesus accomplishes at Easter, because the new life Jesus brought about by his death and rising, has now been created and can be shared with us by the Holy Spirit: a life set free from sin and reaching into eternal life. Sin brings death, but the removal of sin brings life. Jesus accomplishes that removal of sin from our lives by his death. By Jesus' death and resurrection, Jesus establishes an eternal life free from sin, and that is why it is only after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven that Jesus can bring about Pentecost and give the Spirit to us who believe, that we may have the life that Jesus has forever. That is why, the Pentecost Sequence sung today before the Gospel, we are able to say to the Holy Spirit, "come, heal our wounds, our strength renew, on our dryness pour your dew" - the water of the Spirit - and "wash the stains of guilt away."