

## **May 8 – Mother's Day**

Sermon: I'm Thirsty

Scripture: Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21

The Book of Revelation is a hard one to understand. It is apocalyptic literature which means it is talking about the end of times. Since this is so far beyond what our words and thoughts can portray the writer uses word pictures to share his vision. Also, the Christians by this time were a persecuted group. They saw in the actions of Rome a hint of the beginning of the end times. The writer made sure that his word pictures, particularly those aimed at Rome, were unknowable to the uninitiated. He did not want to bring down the wrath of the authorities upon any who might see a copy of his visions. The verses I read today are from the very end of the book. Before this we have had scene after scene of the end times, with fire and plagues and everything else. Finally we get to the vision of the New Jerusalem. Heaven comes to earth. There will be no need for light for God will dwell among us. This New Jerusalem is called the bride of Christ and here in this scripture she is talking with the Spirit of God and inviting all to come to her.

John uses the image of water as a symbol of salvation. Throughout the Gospel of John, Letters of John, and the Book of Revelation, water and Spirit are dominant themes of the saving power of God. We begin with Jesus' baptism where John the Baptist prophesizes that there will come a time where we will be baptized, not with water, but the Spirit. The first miracle of Jesus, in John, is turning water into wine. This miracle has many meanings, among them being the work of salvation has begun. Something new and life giving is being offered by God. In talking with Nicodemus at night Jesus talks about how one must be born by water and the Spirit or they cannot enter the Kingdom of God. Later we have Jesus talking to the woman at the well. There he offers her living water that will be a spring that bubbles up to eternal life. In talking to the Pharisees, Jesus says one time: all who are thirsty should come to me, all who believe in me should drink. At the last meal Jesus washes the disciple's feet. When Peter objects Jesus says that he cannot be a part of the new kingdom if he does not allow Jesus to do this. After his death, in John it talks about how the soldier puts a spear

in Jesus side and blood and water flow out. This image of water, and blood and the Spirit is a major theme in I John where, again, we are hearing about the work of the Spirit and salvation. The Book of Revelation begins with a passage talking about springs of living water, and finally we have today's scripture that says, "The one who is thirsty, come! The one who wishes to receive life-giving water as a gift, come"

I share all of this with you because sometimes we are not aware of how prevalent an image is in the writings of one person, or in this case the people who were disciples of John. Most scholars do not believe all the material attributed to John in the New Testament was written by one person, but instead by a group who were taught by and influenced by the Apostle John. Once you see how an image is continually used, it begins to help us understand what the writer is trying to say to us today.

God Spirit is at work offering us salvation but we have to want it. Since this is Mother's Day I want to share two images that will be common to anyone around children. The first comes from my time as a camp leader in northern Idaho. There the summers are hot and dry. When you have a bunch of young kids running all over, dehydration is a problem. This meant that the counselors had to stop fun activities several times during the afternoon for a water break. For some of the children you would think we were forcing them to drink castor oil, from the looks on their faces and the complaints we heard. They didn't want to stop playing, they didn't want any water. They never had to do this at home, and so the litany went on. You could explain as much as you want that it was important for them to drink water, and that it kept them well, that it was actually life giving, it didn't matter. It just got in the way of what they wanted to do.

Jesus offered the life giving message of the gospel to all. Some, like the woman at the well, freely drank from the water. Many others rejected it. What Jesus was offering was so different, it got in the way of what they viewed as life, that they wanted nothing to do with it. This is why the book of Revelation ends with this invitation to come and drink and receive the life-giving water. It is a gift.

Think about your life and ask yourself, are there places I refuse to drink the life giving water God offers? Perhaps I need to forgive someone as Jesus says I need to do to find life but I choose to reject the words. Or, perhaps you have been challenged to be more generous but you have instead chosen to be resentful towards the person who asked. Or maybe you are like the kids at camp and do some things out of compulsion and not in the spirit of grace. I think of the man who came with his wife to a Bible study. His attitude, his body posture, his face told one and all that he did not want to be there. He sat through all four sessions looking as if he enjoyed it as much as those waiting outside the dentist before a root canal. He was dragged to the water but he did not drink. All of us can probably identify places where we refuse to drink, or we do it with such negativity that it really cannot be life giving.

Now the second image I want to share. I was in the kitchen cleaning up after dinner. Sophi was with us. It was one of those hot days last week. She came in and said with a smile, "Grandpa, can I please have a glass of water?" Now we usually push water on her before dinner and she drinks it because she knows it is good for her. But on occasions she asks for a drink. She does it so sweetly that of course I stop whatever I am doing and filled her cup.

I want to ask you a question. Where are you thirsty for life? You are afraid because some things in your future are pretty unsettling. You are invited to come and drink of the presence of God which will promise peace if not solutions. You are feeling life is a dead end. You are encouraged to drink of new possibilities where you can make a difference. You are embarrassed because of present or past actions. You are invited to drink of the water of repentance and new beginnings. God does not want us to feel like we are in the desert. God does not want us to be alone, afraid, or in doubt. We are asked to come and drink and find new life and salvation.

His wife had been active for a long time in the church as the choir director. Her husband had not been much of a churchman for most of their married life. Herb would come on occasion if their children were doing something or the choir did something extra special. Church was her thing. She invited him weekly but hunting, fishing and football were a lot more important. Then Herb had a massive heart attack. This was just

a year or so before I was appointed pastor of the church. For weeks his life hung in the balance. But finally he stabilized and came home. But his heart was so damaged he had to give up work for a time and just be home. People from the church sent cards, men from the church came by to visit or to take him to lunch. He told me all of this with tears in his eyes. He said, "They didn't even know me and yet they were so good to me." He began to see the life giving water, the love and grace that fills people of faith, as such an awesome force in people's lives. He finally realized why his wife was so involved in the church. It wasn't just because she was the choir director; it was because of the love and support she felt. One Sunday he got dressed and went to church with her. He said, "The doctors don't think I have much time left. Since I can't go hunting and fishing I might as well go with you to church." Herb's heart strengthened and he was able to go back to work and he lived for many, many years. He joined the choir and, while I was there, joined the church. Church became as important for him as it was for her. When one of the men was sick, Herb was now one who went to visit them because he realized how important it had been for him. The stream of life giving water had always been there but now Herb drank from it freely.

New life is ours. Wherever you are thirsty God is offering you water. Drink deeply and let it transform you. Don't be like the kids at camp who had to drink it because it is good for you, but instead embrace what God is offering and find new life and even more, eternal life.