

The sensation of thirst occurs when there is a loss of water from the blood cells of our body. First, there's the dry mouth and a craving for fluids. Then there is decrease in the production of saliva; then difficulty swallowing. If the body still doesn't get the liquid it needs, the skin becomes dry and wrinkly. A fever develops, sweating stops, kidneys shut down, and death can result.

Dehydration can take place with the loss of only 8% of the body's water content. And under normal conditions, with no water intake, we lose 2.5% of the body's water content per day. Under very ordinary conditions, we could experience fatal dehydration levels within 3 days of no water intake. I'm getting thirsty just talking about it.

While Israel was in the desert, God instituted three, weeklong festivals for the people to observe after they entered the Promised Land, namely: Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. The purpose of each was to remind the people of the great and awesome ways that the Lord brought them to the Promised Land. Passover celebrated their great deliverance from Egypt. Pentecost celebrated the way that the Lord fed Israel with food in the desert. And Tabernacles celebrated the way that the Lord supplied water for their thirst in the desert. Today, let's explore the connection between Tabernacles and Pentecost. I think you may be in for a surprise.

During the Feast of Tabernacles everyone built huts or tents made of branches that they lived for the entire week. It was like a big, church campout. This reminded them of the huts that their ancestors lived in, in the desert for 40 years. One of the rituals during this festival reminded everyone of the way God had provided water from the rock at Horeb. Each day during the week, the High Priest would take a water pitcher made of gold and fill it with water. He would walk around the stone altar with it to symbolize the walk in the wilderness. And then he would pour the water into perforated silver bowls and the water would run down over the altar.

While he did this, the trumpets would sound and the people would sing. They would sing, Isaiah 12:3, 'With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.' They would also sing Zechariah 14:8, 'On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem.'

Then, on the 7th day, the last and greatest day of the Feast, the High Priest would carry the pitcher of water around the altar seven times, representing the entire journey of Israel through the desert. And then he would pour the water into the silver bowls. The trumpets would sound and the people would sing, as the water ran down over the altar and flowed out to where the people were gathered. Pretty vivid.

Our gospel reading this morning takes place in Jerusalem, during the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus is present at this festival of water. And John tells us, '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.'"

Isn't that striking? Jesus gives the feast of Tabernacles a whole new spin, identifying himself as the Rock. He claims the event in the desert was a preview of coming attractions, and that coming to him and 'drinking' from him, is the focus of a new kind of life. He was going to provide the Holy Spirit for a spiritually dehydrated world.

It was on the day of Pentecost, then, that the 'true rock' gushed forth with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was 'poured out' on the disciples and 'rivers of living water flowed out of their heart.' They gushed with the gospel of Jesus Christ and everyone who was present heard it preached in their own language.

During the festival of Pentecost, just as during the festivals of Passover and Tabernacles, men and women from the east and from the west were present in Jerusalem. The 'Living water,' the Holy Spirit, was poured out upon them. The Spirit flowed into them. They swallowed it down. And they were refreshed and renewed as they heard of Jesus sacrificial, crucified death, and his victorious resurrection, not merely as historical events, but as actions taken to benefit them. Thousands of people were washed in baptismal water that day, water that in every way connected them to Father and Son by the Spirit. And then, they went back home, where rivers of living water flowed from their hearts to the people around them.

Today, the 'river of living water' flows all the way to you and me. Like Israel of old, our soul thirsts too. Like Israel of old, we know what it means to go through a time of dryness, and to try to address our dehydration ourselves. But no other water will do. You can be adrift in the ocean, surrounded by water. But if you drink it straight, things will go very badly. We are always being tempted to try to satisfy our spiritual thirst by drinking from the wrong water. It looks so inviting. It looks like it will surely quench our thirst for love and peace. So we drink deeply of pride, accomplishments, recognition, the drive to justify ourselves, the drive to look good to others, but it never lasts, and does more harm than good.

That's why, at the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus stands up and shouts, "Come to me and drink." That's why, at the Feast of Pentecost, the apostle Peter stands up and shouts, "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." You and I need Jesus. We need to trust he was perfect for us. We need to trust he was punished for us. We need to trust that he pleads for us. Jesus never said, 'Come to me and I will show you how to save yourself.' No, he said, 'Come to me and drink.' He is the source, the spring, the fountain, the Rock from which all love flows. He is the end to our frantic thirst for approval. The Holy Spirit, giving you the gift of faith in Jesus, enables you to finally understand that everything that is true of Jesus is true of you. You are fully loved. You are the light of the world. You will live forever. The Father is well pleased with you. Living Water.