

Streams of Living Water: Part One

“On the last and greatest day of the Feast,
Jesus stood and said in a loud voice,
‘If anyone is thirsty,
let him come to me and drink.
Whoever believes in me,
as the Scripture has said,
streams of living water will flow from within him.’”

– John 7:37-38

This is one of my favorite texts. I could almost stop here and simply ask that we read this over and over until we see it. Until we get it. Until we feel it.

*If anyone is thirsty,
let him come to me and drink.
Whoever believes in me,
streams of living water will flow from within him.*

But at risk of ruining the perfect moment, I go on.

“If anyone is thirsty.” Well, that covers it. We are all so thirsty. We thirst to feel good about ourselves. We thirst for someone to make us feel good by the way they treat us. We thirst for satisfaction and significance in our work. We thirst to know that we matter to someone. We thirst to love and be loved, to hold and be held, to touch and be touched. We thirst for someone to see all of us, the good and the bad, and still remain deeply committed to us.

The Bible, coming to us physically out of desert lands, is filled with thirsty cries. And so Jesus comes offering living water. Just in the Gospel of John, this theme is well-developed. Jesus turns water into wine (chap. 2). He tells Nicodemus that no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit (chap. 3). He offers the woman at the well “living water” such as whoever drinks from it will never thirst; instead, this water will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life, to life that lasts forever (chap. 4).

Jesus is drawing on the rich imagery of living water in Hebrew scripture. Citing only one such case right now, in Jeremiah 2:13, God through the prophet says, “My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.” I’ve done some of that. My spiritual backyard is filled with broken cisterns. How about yours? Have you? Dug broken cisterns that cannot hold water? Sought to satisfy your thirst where it can’t be? Shopped for milk at the hardware store?

So Jesus comes saying,

***If anyone is thirsty,
let him come to me and drink.
Whoever believes in me,
streams of living water will flow from within him.***

He says this during the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem (all this from John 7-8). The Feast of Tabernacles or Booths was originally an annual fall harvest festival (think of September-October) when Israel also commemorated its wilderness wanderings. It was a joyous festival when people built booths in which they lived for seven days. Our Jewish friends and neighbors here in Stamford still do this. In Jerusalem in the time of Jesus it included water rituals and torch-lit processions. In desert lands water was to be celebrated. In the evening the temple courts would be lit by torches. And the people would sing and dance all night long. In the early morning water would be drawn from the Siloam spring out by Hezekiah's tunnel and carried in procession to the temple where it would be offered to God. It was said in the Jewish Talmud that "one who did not see the joy of the water-drawing celebration has not seen joy in his life."

And so Jesus draws on both the images of water and light. In John 8:12, Jesus says,

***I am the light of the world.
Whoever follows me
will never walk in darkness,
but will have the light of life.***

Now in encountering the presence of God, it is helpful to draw on both these images.

First, LIGHT.

Consider this guided meditation. My favorite devotional guide begins every morning with this:

BE STILL
AND AWARE OF GOD'S PRESENCE WITHIN
AND ALL AROUND.

[Maybe this helps.]

Sense God as a warm, nurturing light ... in the center of your heart. Feel the love, the peace, the wellness, something that feels like strength, right there in the center of your heart.

Feel that light spread throughout your body, slowly, lovingly, throughout your chest.

Breathe deeply.

Feel the healing warmth spread through your waist and down your legs. To your feet. To your toes. Strengthening your knees.

Now feel it spread upward from your heart, through your shoulders and down your arms. Sense it warmly wrapping whatever is hurting in you. And healing you.

Feel the loving warmth move up your neck, throughout your face. Experience your face, your brow, relaxing. Sense it reach and open up your breathing. Let it reach your eyes. Let it reach your ears. Let it fill your entire body with light and warmth.

BE STILL
AND AWARE OF GOD'S PRESENCE WITHIN
AND ALL AROUND.

Feel God's presence reach out from you to others. Trace it to all the places you will go today, spreading out from you to where you live, to where you work. Everywhere, all around you, this warming, loving, healing presence of God.

BE STILL
AND AWARE OF GOD'S PRESENCE WITHIN
AND ALL AROUND.

– Dale Pauls

“Part Two”(of two) next week.