

March 31, 2019
Cross Words: I Thirst
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John 19: 28-29

So, I want to welcome you again. If this is a place where you are visiting for Spring Break because it's so warm here, Welcome! If you're one of those people who didn't get to go somewhere on Spring Break, Welcome! We have a huge crew right now, 40-plus people from Wayzata Community Church building two houses in Mexico, one of them for a nineteen year old couple with a child for the first home that they'll have lived in. So, please, be praying for them throughout the service. If you are going to be doing anything else but listening to me, be praying for them because they need our prayers. They're doing a great job. You can check out what's happening on that build on Facebook. There are all kinds of beautiful pictures of our students and adults who are there building on behalf of us in that community alongside those in need.

This morning, our text is a part of our series called "Cross Words." Now, these seven last sayings or seven last words of Jesus are harmonized sayings of Jesus. They're not in all four Gospels. All seven are not in all four books, but the Canonical Gospels together, the four books together, hold these seven last words, and it gives us a picture of what's happening in the last moments of Jesus' life. Now, does it capture every word that Jesus said from the cross? Probably not, but it captures the words from the cross that the Gospel writers felt could teach some really important things. So, please, if you want to turn with me, John 19:28-29, for our reading this morning: After this, when Jesus knew that it was all now finished, he said, "I am thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was there. So, they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stock of hyssop and lifted it to Jesus lips. Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

What does it mean to be thirsty? Now, my kids use thirst against me. It's always Jackson's final ploy to not have to go to bed. "I'm thirsty, Dad. Can you get me some water?" And like most good parents, we can't be like, "No, go to bed thirsty." So, it's always the one that works, right? The other ones don't work, but that one always works, and all of us have had this sensation of thirst at one time or another, and most of us have even mistaken the sensation of thirst for something else. Doctors tell us that often when we think we are hungry, what our body is actually telling us is that we're thirsty. So, you could drink a glass of water and eat less. - All right. We can go home. Sermon done. - Our bodies are made up of 70 percent water. So, scientists tell us that by the time we have the sensation of thirst in our bodies, we are actually probably a quart of water low in what we need. Now, I find it amazing that our bodies work this way, that, when we need something, we get these physical reminders. Our bodies send us signals that they are in need. Many times while sitting with people who are dying, I've heard the words, "I'm thirsty," and typically a nurse or a doctor or a hospice worker or a loved one will take some chips of ice and place it in their loved one's mouth. I remember when my grandmother was passing and we were with her in hospice for the weeks that led up to that, she would say to my mom that she was thirsty, and my nurses had given my mom these little sponges on a little plastic straw. My mom would dip it in water and rub it on my grandmother's lips.

Jesus shows us that our physical needs and our spiritual needs are often connected and linked, and Jesus talks a lot about being thirsty in the four Gospels. One of my favorite passages is when he spoke

to the woman at the well. You remember the story. Jesus says to the Samaritan woman, who is coming to draw water in the middle of the day – he says, “I’m thirsty,” and the woman says to him, “How is that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” Jesus answered, “If you knew who it was that said to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” The story goes on, and Jesus says, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give will never be thirsty.” Their conversation continued, but Jesus, through this demonstration, demonstrated to the woman her own need. He was coming, and he was parched from his journey, but she was thirsty, too, with a different type of need. See, she was in need of liberation. She needed to be liberated in herself.

That’s why she was coming to draw water in the middle of the day when nobody draws water – because she was so full of shame she wasn’t willing to engage the people around her. She was in need of liberation, but she also needed to be liberated in the minds of her community. Why else would she be hiding out from them, but Jesus knew that it wasn’t just this liberation of self and this liberation of community, but that, actually, there was a spiritual liberation that this woman needed that he could provide her. So, Jesus uses this physical sign of thirst to help this woman recognize her own thirst. Now, it’s fascinating to me that in this story, when Jesus says to the woman, “I am thirsty,” it’s literally the exact same Greek phrase that Jesus speaks from the cross. “I am thirsty.”

And there are a multitude of ways that we can hear these words from the cross. First, the writer of John’s Gospel could be trying to show us more of Jesus’ human side. We could interpret these words simply to be a part of Jesus human side, like us, and when he’s dying, he, too, wants something to drink. For we know that he has been suffering this physically exhausting death and experiencing all the pains that went with the crucifixion, and he’s simply thirsty, and we could reason from this that the same man who remained silent through the trials, silent through the beatings, silent through the final days of mind-boggling torture, perhaps he finally had enough silence and let his guard down to show us he’s as human as the rest of us and has needs. But I believe the Gospel writer is trying to say something more about Jesus. I believe the Gospel writer was trying to articulate a deeper meaning that goes beyond just the physical thirst because John keeps plugging in these thirst ideas throughout all of his work. In John, chapter four, is where we see the Samaritan woman at the well. In John, chapter 7, Jesus says to the multitudes in Jerusalem, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink.”

These passages become a back drop from which we can see Jesus on the cross, crying out that he, too, is thirsty. He who was the source of living water is now thirsty as he dies on the cross. The source of light, the source of grace, the source of hope, the source of love, the source of living water is thirsty. Can you feel the pathos of this scene? Look at the verse of the Gospel of John that we read this morning. After this, when Jesus knew that it was all finished, he said, in order to complete and fulfill this scripture, “I am thirsty.” See, it is the phrase directly before the words of thirst that I am interested in, “And Jesus, seeing that all these things were now fulfilled.” And in order to make perfect, the scripture said, “I thirst.” Everything was done. It was all complete. This mission of love that Jesus started was done, and out of the recesses of his being, he pulls back some words from Psalm 22 and Psalm 69, and he says, “I thirst.” Jesus, the teacher, the one who points the way, the one who helps us recognize our own needs and the needs of those around us chose to talk to us about his own needs. I believe that Jesus here,

through the Gospel of John, is giving us one final reminder, one final plea from the cross for us to recognize what his mission was all about, right? And it was just a few days before, when he's in the upper room with the disciples, and they're sharing this meal, and Jesus takes off his outer cloak, and he wraps it around his hand, and he bends down and takes his disciples feet, and he washes their feet, and he calls them to do the same, to enter a life of service alongside him.

I believe Jesus was giving us one last word, one last way to recognize our need for a liberator, one last way to recognize that we, too, are all thirsty. See, we have a way as humans of feeling that we don't really have needs or at least needs that anybody could help us with. We're raised to be confident in our own abilities, self-assured that we can do everything on our own. We're socialized to believe that, if we ask for help, that somehow, we're weak or lazy or incompetent. This is the underlying philosophy of the American Dream, that if you work hard enough, if you have enough drive you can have anything, and Jesus, in these two words, just as with the woman at the well, directs us to think a different way, to think about our own liberation, or our own thirst for living water, and not only are we able to recognize our own thirst, but we learn how to recognize the thirst of those around us. Jesus tells us in the Gospel of Matthew in a parable that "the king will say to the just. Come, you that are blessed by my father. Inherit the kingdom that was laid for you from the foundation of the world, for I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger, and you welcomed me. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you took care of me. I was in prison, and you visited me." But the just answered, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or naked or sick or in prison?" And the Lord answered them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to the least of these, you did it to me."

So, Jesus tells us that we have this opportunity every day to care for him. We care for him in the way that we care for other people. Jesus, as he beckons from the cross that he is thirsty, says, "You can satiate my thirst," and, yet, every day we walk past people who are hungry or sick or naked or in prison or helpless or hopeless. My wife and I were driving to Missouri to see my parents. It was during the lovely cold winter, and we're driving past a prison on the freeway, and my wife says, "I wonder if they get coats?" I had never thought about whether or not people in prison get coats. So, I put it on Facebook, and I have a few friends on Facebook that have been in prison. They all wrote back, "No, you don't get a coat. You have to pay for a coat if you want a coat." "Well, how do you get money in prison." I had started this long Facebook chain about how this whole exchange works. I've driven past that prison at least twenty times since I've lived here. Have we missed seeing Jesus in them? Have we forgotten that what we do unto the least of these, we do to him? Have we forgotten that Jesus says from the cross, "I am thirsty."?

Now, if you're hearing judgment this morning, please don't because I do this all the time myself. I can even be in the middle of doing "God stuff," doing my preachery job and totally miss what Jesus is asking of us here, and I think that is why this message from the cross is so beautiful because there is no condemnation. There is no judgment. Jesus isn't shaking his head in disgust at those around him and saying, "I thirsty! Can't you just see?" And we can assume that Jesus knew that his followers would fail at this over and over again, and in the beauty of this moment and in the depths of his own physical suffering, when all his work on earth was completed, one simple plea from the cross. "I'm thirsty." And it comes to us today from the least of these, from the mother on welfare, from the victims of abuse,

from the oppressed, from the disabled, from the victim of war and poverty and famine, from those still sitting in prison, from the borderlands of our country, but also from the borderlands of our own lives. John tells us that from the cross Jesus cries out to us in thirst. Jesus reminds us today that he's still thirsty, and we can do something to help satiate that thirst, for blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice for they will be filled.

Please pray with me. This morning, God, we hear your final words on the cross telling us you're thirsty, but may we hear your final words. As we walk throughout our day, as we go to work this week, as we are with our families, as we read the newspaper and hear the news, may we hear that you are thirsty, and may we respond. Respond.