

Message: Fruit, Gifts and Power
Sermon Series: Helping Other Follow Jesus
By Pastor Daniel Dennison
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John 7:37-39

About 15 years ago I had the pleasure of leading a mission team of college students to a remote part of Belize. I remember that trip vividly for a couple of reasons: First, it was scorching hot. Of course, we expected heat going to central America, but they were having abnormal record temperatures with heat indexes into the 120s. I also remember that trip because combined with the heat we were building a cinder block wall. And let me tell you mixing cement and hauling cinder blocks in 120-degree heat just don't mix. But perhaps most memorable about that trip was half of our team getting violently ill with nausea and diarrhea.

So, I remember on the 2nd day we had plenty of water, but the one store in town that had ice was out of ice. The day began by having to take water breaks with lukewarm water, but as the temperature began to rise and there was no way to keep the water cool, our water supply began to taste like bathwater. When it's 120 degrees and you're dripping in sweat and wet concrete there is absolutely nothing satisfying about drinking a hot cup of water.

Which is what made the little girl riding down the street on her bike selling popsicles look like an angel sent from heaven. I gave that little girl all the money I had in my pocket and took all of her homemade popsicles. I yelled at the team to come get popsicles as I started to just tear into them. Normally I like to take my time with a popsicle and savor the flavor, but I was just gobbling it down and even rubbing it on my face. Because hey sticky sugar water isn't any more uncomfortable than dried cement!

At this point about half my team was just taking down those popsicles as the other half of the team wearily made their way from inside where they were trying to cool off. And that's when one of the little freshman girls on my team said: do you suppose that little girl used bottled water to make these popsicles? And instantly my heart just sank. And probably for no other reason but psychological

ones my stomach immediately began to hurt. And that is how I made half of a college mission team violently ill.

Now why do I tell you this story? Because every single one of us in here this morning have experienced and perhaps are currently experiencing the kind of thirst and dehydration that I felt 15 years ago in Belize. Oh it's probably not a literal dehydration, but all of us have spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional thirsts in our lives. And most of us tend to try and quench those thirsts with things that ultimately can make us violently ill. It may be a thirst for more love and affirmation from others and we try to quench that thirst by looking for love in all the wrong places or by tearing others down to make ourselves feel better. It may be a thirst for more money and physical possessions, and we try and quench that thirst by working 80 hours a week at the expense of our families or maybe through unethical decisions. It may be a thirst of loneliness and depression and we try to quench that thirst with booze or pills or unhealthy uses of technology.

Every one of us in this place this morning carries baggage with us and we bring some kind of thirst that needs quenching. And the good news for us is that scripture has an answer for us. Listen with me as I read our text this morning from John 7:37-39

³⁷ On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." ³⁹ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

For those of you who have your sermon journals out, and I hope you do, you're probably wondering why I just read the wrong text. Well, there's a funny story about that, which I won't get into, but through a series of mis-communications I wrote my sermon using Tuesday's text from the sermon journal and not Monday's text, which is always the sermon text for the following Sunday. Once I realized the mistake, my sermon was done and I gotta be honest, I really didn't

want to re-write my sermon! But hey if God can use a murderer like Moses, or a prostitute, or a paralytic to bring his message, surely he can use me and the wrong sermon text to still speak his word this morning, amen?

We only read 3 verses of John 7, but the entire chapter is recording Jesus' interactions with people at the Feast of Tabernacles. This is an annual celebration among Jews to celebrate God's deliverance of his people. And so people from all over the region would spill into Jerusalem and set up temporary tents. This festival lasted 8 days and part way through the festival we read earlier in John 7 that Jesus got up and began teaching. And so controversy begins to build. Some are intrigued and even inspired and encouraged by his words. Others, like the Pharisees and Sadducees were outraged.

And our text in v.37 says **"On the last and greatest day, Jesus stood up once more."** Let me give you just a little more unpacking: Every day during the feast of tabernacles the priests would march in unison to the pool of Siloam and fill golden vessels with water and then march back to the temple and pour the water out on the altar. They did this to remember God's provision for them in the wilderness, specifically when they were without water and on the verge of extinction and God used Moses to bring water for the Israelites out of a rock.

And what Jesus is doing here in our text is subtly saying: I am the ultimate fulfillment of what happened in the wilderness. And in the same way I'm here to nourish and water you again. The 8th day of the Feast of Tabernacles was set apart for sacrifices and for the joyful dismantling of the temporary tents and the repeated singing of the Hallel, Psalm 113-118. And in place of this physical water Jesus offers them spiritual water. Instead of the ritual he offers a reality. He stands up and cries out with a loud voice: **Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.**

So here's your first point if you're taking notes: There's only one condition necessary to come to Jesus. But it's absolutely necessary: We've got to be thirsty. We have to be humble and contrite enough to admit our own needs and dysfunction. You know, it's really hard to admit that we have need!

I don't know if you know this or not, but we have an incredible staff here at Asbury. And regularly many of them will ask me: hey, is there anything you need? Can I help you with anything? And my default answer is usually: Nah, I'm good. Even when I'm swamped and behind and I really do need help, it's HARD to admit that I need help. We see this at a very early age. I have a child that shall remain nameless and when this child is trying to fix something or this child's zipper is stuck and they can't get it up or down, or maybe this particular child is trying to get some kind of puzzle together and is getting frustrated, or maybe this child is trying to tie its shoes and is struggling. I will offer my help. And this child will just throw everything and say NO. And I tell Mindy, I have no idea where this child inherited such tendencies. To which she always kindly reminds me that at the age of 39 I still act that way. It's hard to admit that we need help!

Why do people suffer for years with addiction? There are a lot of reasons, but probably at the top of the list is that in order for us to break the cycle of addiction we have to be willing to admit we have a problem. And that we need help. That's the first step of AA: Admit that we are powerless over our problem. And what Jesus is telling his listeners in this passage and what he is trying to tell us this morning is that we have to admit that we are thirsting for more. That we have a need and we can't quench it on our own.

That's the essence of the Gospel message: That we don't come to Christ touting our accomplishments and our titles and our net worth, but we come to Christ empty handed and with open arms declaring that we need him in our life. Friends, I don't know where you find yourself in the midst of this morning's message, but I suspect some of you this morning are weary. And you're weary because you're trying so darned hard to prove your worth. That you're smart enough or pretty enough or wealthy enough or savvy enough to run in the circles you do. Or maybe you're desperately holding on trying to convince yourself that you're the right kind of parent, or spouse, or boss, or employee, but in your own mind you just never seem to measure up. Outwardly you try to show you have it all together, but inwardly you're continually putting yourself on trial because you don't believe you can measure up. Friends, Jesus' message for you this morning is that you're ok. Not because of anything you have done, but because of his grace. And all it

takes to be a recipient of his grace is to admit that you are desperately in need of his grace.

I know that's not easy to do. I know we certainly don't want to do that on social media where we can put everything through a beautiful filter. But this place needs to be a safe place where you can be ok NOT being ok. Because it's tiring trying to pretend we're not ok! Can I say that again? It's ok to NOT be ok and it's ok to admit that you're not ok especially here at church.

So point #1 we admit that we are thirsty. We admit that we are in need of God's grace to be at work in our lives. And here's point #2: Once we do that. Once we admit our need for Christ in our lives and we invite him in, God begins to work within us because the **Spirit of God resides within us**. Look back with me at v.39: **Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.**

This is a rather cryptic statement but the gist of it and the most important thing I want you to hear is that the God of the universe resides in us through the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Our actual sermon text from John 14 makes that very clear, let me read part of that chapter to you: **I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you (v16-17).** Do you hear what these verses are saying: The Spirit of God, the very presence and essence and being of the creator of the universe resides within the believer. If you have professed a faith in Jesus Christ, he actually resides within you!

Now what's a little confusing is that it seems as if John is saying in chapter 7 there was no Holy Spirit yet. Put v.39 back up on the screen for us please. If we look at the whole of scripture as well as Christian tradition, remember these are the two things that are primary to us in our understanding of the Bible that Tom has so eloquently reminded us of the past few weeks. If we consider those two things, then we are wrong to assume what John means in 7:39 is that the Holy Spirit does

not yet exist. John actually refers to the Holy Spirit in his very first chapter, listen to this: **And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on Jesus (v.32).”**

There are also numerous examples of the Spirit's presence in the Old Testament and for those of us who struggle with the concept of the Holy Spirit I think the Old Testament frames it really well for us. In the OT the presence of God and the Holy Spirit are the same thing. So for example whenever we talk about Gideon or Sampson or David and the spirit of God descending on that person to give them power for great feats and deeds. We're also told in the next sentence “and God was with him. The hand of the Lord was with him.” The presence of God and the Holy Spirit are the same.

There's that wonderful prayer that many of you know from Psalm 51:11, **Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.** The Holy Spirit is God's presence continually at work in our hearts and lives. And so John is not trying to suggest that the Holy Spirit has not been around up until this point. I believe he's trying to say that it took the life and death of Jesus Christ to open the floodgates for the Spirit to become real and powerful and known to all believers. Because when he says “Jesus was not yet glorified,” he's referring to Jesus' death and resurrection. So it's Jesus' resurrection that brings full life and power to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. And when we give our lives to this resurrected Jesus, we are given the Spirit.

Think of it this way: A great power can exist for years and even centuries without anyone being able to tap it. There has always been atomic power in this world; it was not a human invention. But only in the last 100 years have we tapped into it and actually used it. Friends there is power in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Only one man in history has ever conquered death and its through resurrection power that the Holy Spirit becomes fully alive and present in our lives. And that presence is the presence of God at work in our lives. Here's what this SHOULD look like in our lives..... (pour water into basin).

Now I don't know about you, but I find that REALLY convicting. What do I mean you say? Well I just showed you what the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in our lives SHOULD look like. But when you look at the whole of our lives, here's what it often ACTUALLY looks like....(eyedropper)

How do we get away with the mediocrity that characterizes most of our lives? How do we get away with that in light of knowing that the Spirit of God resides in us? The God of the universe, the only one who has beaten death and been resurrected to life literally resides within us and yet how often do our lives look the exact opposite of that? How do we justify the fact that we are too stingy with our money? How is it that we tend to be really good at overlooking the impoverished and the outcast? Listen to John 14:27 this comes immediately after v.26 where Jesus promises the Holy Spirit: **"My peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.**

Christian believer, does that verse describe your life? Having a heart that is not troubled and is at peace? When the presence of God through the work of the Holy Spirit resides within us, how can we justify the fact that instead of providing life giving water to those around us we are often a drain sucking up water?

It shouldn't be, because 3rd and final point: **When the Spirit of God takes hold in our lives we should be breathing life into others.** As the sermon title suggests: We should be bearing fruit in our lives, We should be putting the gifts that God has bestowed upon us to work in the world, the Spirit of God should be alive and at work in those around us because of its work in our own lives. We should be a fountain of life and water to those around us and NOT a drain. Look back with me one more time at our text, v38: **Whoever believes in me as the Scripture has said, "Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."**

Water renews. Water revives. Water quenches. Water gives life and it quenches longings! Water flows! It has a direction. In this case it flows out. A Christian should be a fountain of water for others. We should be that rock in the desert that water flows out of to bring life to others. So here's the question I want you to reflect on: Are you a fountain for people or are you a drain on people? Do people

around you feel sucked dry or do they feel like you are enhancing them and giving them life? How can we have streams of living water flowing out of our hearts and lives and into the lives of others?

I think one of the things we do with a text like this is we immediately jump to something big and momentous. So we hear the preacher say “you should have streams of living water flowing from you” and our brains jump to things like: I need to sell all of my possessions and go be a missionary. I want to submit to you this morning that if we want to live lives that are defined by streams of living water flowing out from us and seeing other lives being touched and changed it starts with small, simple, sustainable behavioral changes. I want to begin to close by lifting up just one very practical and simple thing we could all do to breath life into other people.

I think the most simple and yet most powerful way we can breath life into others or suck it out of them is with our words.

I want you to think for a minute about how you talk about other people, how do you talk about your family, how do you talk about your day, how do you talk about your future, what kinds of things are you putting out in the virtual world on social media, how do you talk about your job and your supervisor and your co-workers, how do you talk to people who wait on you and clean up your messes? And what I want you to think about is as you add ALL of that up. If we were to look at everything you put out there: are you breathing life into people? Are you bringing joy and hope into people’s lives? Or are you sucking life out of people?

There was a research study done a few years ago in which they reported that between 30-40% of ALL of our conversations center around some kind of complaint or grumbling. I mean that’s mind boggling until you start to think about the kinds of conversations you have every day and then it becomes a little convicting. There was a report in NY Times that said 95% of consumers who don’t like a product they have purchased don’t tell the company who created that product, but they will tell at least 10 friends. Isn’t that crazy? We buy something that we don’t like and rather than tell the person who can fix it, we tell a bunch of people who can’t, just so we can try and make their day just a little bit less great.

We all do this! I am not immune to this. Complaining and negativity has become the language of our culture.

Think about how we build relationships in our culture. I remember a few years ago striking up a great conversation at an OU football game with a stranger next to me. Wanna know what my opening line was: Man, these refs are really terrible! To which he replied with some descriptive words that I can't repeat because I don't want to get any angry emails from you all. We proceeded to have great conversation the rest of that game, but it was centered around negativity and complaining.

It has become so hard wired into us to just complain about things and point out things that are wrong with others.

I was looking at the twitter feeds of several celebrities earlier this week and all I could find was complaints. And then I thought, shoot forget celebrities, let's just pull up some of your twitter feeds. And so I compiled a bunch of your social media posts over the last week to put up on the screens and show you what I'm talking about... Nah, I'm kidding, I wouldn't do that. That scared you though didn't it?

And I can already feel some tension in here because I know some of you are thinking "yea sure I complain, but everyone complains." And that's the point. If we conduct ourselves the same way everyone else does, we don't stand out, we aren't being streams of living water flowing out toward others and we're not helping others follow Jesus. The Christian, because of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, is meant to have a totally different way of communicating, the way we talk should be attractive to people.

Hopefully all of you have been to a church where you were just overwhelmed with their radical hospitality. Like there were people at every door to greet you, people genuinely took an interest in you. People invited you to sit next to them. Hopefully you have experienced that here and I'm so sorry if that has not been your experience. Because here's the deal, when we as a church conduct ourselves that way, then it makes complete sense for us to talk about a God who loves us. When we act this way we can actually amplify this message that God loves us. But when we are a church who stands around and complains. When the majority of our talk is grumbling, we dilute the message about a God who loves us and came

to rescue us. And good luck trying to convince someone that the Spirit of God resides within you if most of what they hear from you is bitterness and negativity.

Your words have power. The right words can get you a job, the wrong words can get you an unemployment check. The right words can get you a date, the wrong words, can get you a date on your couch with Netflix. And so I want all of us to reflect on our own lives: when you wake up in the morning and start to speak to your family, when you begin speaking to your circle of friends, when you're talking to others here at church, when you start tweeting, when you are putting words out there: what are you pouring into the community? Are you putting out small bits of vitamins and proteins and things that help others? Or are you putting out small bits of poison that slowly drains a community?

Church, if we're going to be serious about helping others follow Jesus, our lives must be characterized by life giving water flowing from our own lives and breathing life and grace into others. Let's Pray...