

052823 Sermon "**River of Living Water**" John 7:27-29

A little 7-year-old boy named Alex was staring at a large plaque in the church foyer. The plaque was covered with names and small American flags. As Alex looked at it, his pastor walked up and said, "Good morning Alex." Alex said, "Pastor, what is this?"

"Well, it is a memorial to all the young men and women who died in the service." Soberly, they stood together staring at the plaque.

In a tender voice Alex asked, "Which service, the 8:30 or the 11:00?"

Memorial Day is an American holiday, observed on the last Monday of May, honoring the men and women who died while serving in the U.S. military for freedom and peace. Originally known as Decoration Day, it originated in the years following the Civil War and became an official federal holiday in 1971. The freedom we now enjoy is never simply given. It is something we enjoy because someone risked their life to fight for freedom. Once again, Veterans and veterans' families, thank you for your service and service of your family.

On this remembrance day, we come before God and ask for healing for families of lost loved ones, protection over other military members, and to help the rest of us make sure that Memorial Day is more than once a year, but a continual act of gratitude. Furthermore, I hope and pray the examples of their sacrifice inspire in us the selfless love of our Lord Jesus Christ who died on the cross to give salvation and eternal life to all who believe in Him.

Today is Memorial Day Sunday and the Day of Pentecost. It commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles and other disciples following the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ, and it marks the beginning of the Christian church's mission to the world.

According to John 7:37, which we read today, "On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there." What festival are we talking about here? It takes place when Jesus is in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles.

Although not often mentioned in the New Testament, the Feast of Tabernacles was one of the "big three" annual pilgrimages of adult Jewish males to Jerusalem, along with Passover and Pentecost. Originally it was a harvest festival, but in the time of Jesus it also took on a meaning to remember what God provided for the Israelites during their wanderings in the wilderness.

According to Jewish tradition, water ceremonies were an important part of this festival. A priest drew water from the Pool of Siloam in a golden pitcher, brought it to the temple, and poured it into a silver bowl beside the altar. When the priest poured the water, he prayed to the Lord for rain.

It is significant that on the last day of this festival, in which water is an important symbol, Jesus declared: "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scriptures say, rivers of living water will flow from within him" (7:37-38).

Jesus says that those who drink the water he gives will become sources of this living water in them. This is similar to what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman in chapter 4, "Whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst. The water I give will become in him a spring of water springing up to eternal life" (4:14).

In chapter 6, Jesus described himself as “the bread of life” and “the living bread that came down from heaven.” Here in Chapter 7, he speaks of “the living water.” In other words, it means that when anyone believes in Jesus, the Holy Spirit dwells in the believer and supplies life. Jesus promises that whoever eats of the bread he gives and drinks of the water he gives will live forever. Jesus is talking about salvation and eternal life. It is not given without cost. It was given because Jesus without sin died on the cross to save whoever believe in Him.

Now, in Jesus, the Word became flesh, God has come to “tabernacle” among us once again. Since Jesus could not remain in the flesh, He promised to send His Spirit to be with His disciples forever (14:17). God is with us and God provides so that rivers of living water flow from within us to a thirsty world.

Fanny J. Crosby wrote the following hymn lyrics in the United Methodist Hymnal, No. 419:

*I am thine, O Lord, I have heard thy voice,
and it told thy love to me;
but I long to rise in the arms of faith
and be closer drawn to thee.
Draw me nearer, nearer, blessed Lord,
to the cross where thou hast died.
Draw me nearer, nearer, blessed Lord,
to thy precious, bleeding side.*

Blind at six weeks of age, Crosby began composing texts at age 6. This hymn is one of many collaborations between Crosby and composer William Doane:

“One evening she and Doane talked at length about the nearness of God in their lives. When Fanny went to her room, her mind and heart were flooded with ideas from their conversation. Before she went to sleep, the lines of “I am thine, O Lord” were in her mind. The next morning, she recited the words to Doane, who wrote down the stanzas and composed the tune.”

The text appeared with the following inscription from Hebrews 10:22: “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.” Crosby seems to mix her cleansing metaphors intentionally “pure water” and “bleeding side.” The connection becomes clearer when you read the previous verses in Hebrews 10: “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having a high priest over the house of God.”

Like so many of Crosby’s hymns, “I am thine, O Lord” is written in the first person—a personal testimony of her relationship with Christ. Stanza one begins with a total surrender to Christ, “I am thine, O Lord,” and the desire to “be closer drawn to thee.”

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus, let us remember those who served for freedom and peace on this day of remembrance. And let us also remember the One we all serve and his words on this day of Pentecost. Still, God is with us and God provides. Jesus died on the cross and was resurrected to become your bread of life and water of life. Jesus is your salvation and eternal life. Fairfield Grace, May God's grace and peace and blessing be with you, with your family, with your business, with your studies, and with the lives of your children. Amen.