

Date: 12th June 2011

Sermon: Rev Dr André Groenewald

Reading: John 7:37-44

Background to the reading

The feast that is mentioned here refers to the Feast of the Tabernacles. The “last day” of the Feast of Tabernacles refers to the eighth day. For at least the first seven days of the feast, priests marched in procession from the Pool of Siloam to the temple and poured out water at the base of the altar. According to the Talmud water was drawn from Siloam’s pool in a golden vessel to be carried in procession to the Temple on the Feast of Tabernacles. The Pool of Siloam was one of the principal sources of water supply to Jerusalem. It was the irregular pool of Gihon below the Fountain Gate, to the East South-East of the city. This fed water along an open canal, which flowed slowly along the Southern Eastern slopes, called the *šilōah*. In New Testament times it was used for sick people or others to wash them.

The Feast or Festival of Booths or Ingathering (*Sukkoth*), along with Passover and the Festival of Weeks, were one of the three major pilgrimage festivals of Judaism. It was celebrated for eight days - from the 15th of Tishri [late September or early October]). It was Israel’s joyous, thanksgiving, autumnal harvest festival for the ingathering from the threshing floor and the winepress. Its main distinctive ritual was the requirement to “stay in temporary dwellings or booths” made of boughs of trees and branches of palm trees for the 7 days of the feast, in commemoration of God’s protection of Israel during their wanderings in the desert. Sacrifices were offered on the 7 days, beginning with thirteen bullocks and other animals on the 1st day and diminishing by one bullock each day until on the 7th day seven bullocks were offered. On the 8th day there was a solemn assembly when one bullock, one ram and seven lambs were offered. This was the last day, ‘that great day of the feast’, which John was referring to. As a feast, divinely instituted, it was never forgotten.

The public reading of Scripture at this feast included the one passage in the Prophets that emphasized this feast, Zechariah 14, which was interpreted in conjunction with Ezekiel 47. Together these texts taught that rivers of living water would flow forth from the temple (in Jewish teaching, at the very center of the earth, from the foundation stone of the temple), bringing life to all the earth. The water-drawing ceremony pointed toward this hope.

Verse 38 declares that Jesus fulfils the Scriptures read at the feast. He is the foundation stone of a new temple, the source of the water of life. He will give them His Holy Spirit and living water will flow from them.

Most of Judaism did not believe that the Spirit was prophetically active in their own time but expected the full outpouring of the Spirit in the Messianic age or the world to come. Water usually symbolized the Torah or the Law of wisdom in Jewish texts, but John follows the Old Testament example in using it for the Spirit.

When people heard this from Jesus, they immediately thought He is the Prophet referring to a “prophet like Moses”, in whose time God also gave living water in the wilderness. Others said that He is the Christ.

Here in our reading it seems as if the “people” John is referring to are quite ignorant of the facts that they were supposed to know with regards to Jesus’ origins. The people said that Jesus could not be the Messiah because He was from Galilee while ignoring the fact that He was indeed born in Bethlehem just like the Old Testament predicted. He was indeed also, like Micah 5:2 said of Davidic descent.

The emphasis of our reading is the fact that Jesus promises His Holy Spirit who would let the believers’ faith flow like living water wherever they go.

Amen

Sermon

The text verse for the sermon is verse 38: ³⁸ *Whoever believes in me, as^b the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.*”

I am at times astonished to hear how different people speak of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes when people do talk about the Holy Spirit, they talk of the gifts and talents and it seems as if it is a competition between who got more and who got less talents or gifts. It is also astonishing to me how many can forget that the Holy Spirit is God’s Spirit working in the hearts and minds of different people. It is not a spirit with a small letter belonging to the human race which the human race can use or may I say abuse for their own benefit.

I mean let’s be honest. How many times have we heard about people who claimed that they were talking on behalf of the “Spirit of God” and that this or that will be happening. Just recently someone actually claimed that the last day on this earth will be happening 21st of May 2011.

Why do people think of God’s Holy Spirit as something independent even unattached to God’s Being? Why do people often use God’s Spirit as a power who almost contradicts the Bible itself.

I think it is because they miss the central meaning of Pentecost. The reason why Jesus left His Holy Spirit is contained in our reading this morning.

Jesus left His Holy Spirit so that His living water can flow from Him to everyone who confesses Him as Lord and Saviour. He did not mean that His Spirit will disrupt people’s lives through confusion, and so-called “prophets” who contradict everything He said. His Living water gives life and hope to those who are in need of survival in this world. His Living water helps us to quench the thirst for self-approval and self-righteousness. His Living water is full of love, mercy and forgiveness.

If we drink from it, we will surely make and be a difference wherever we go. Although we are cracked clay pots, we still are vehicles of God’s Holy Spirit. Although we are not perfect, metaphorically through God’s Holy Spirit we still can make flowers grow in those gardens where there is no sunlight and no living water. Although we are weary and full of burdens, metaphorically through God’s Holy Spirit we still can help others to carry their burdens with hope. All of us received gifts and talents. If we start

to use them to the benefit of the kingdom of God, we will see the difference around us and in us.

May we concentrate this coming year on how much we can share of the living water that we receive from God's Holy Spirit because we have the promise that this water will never ever run dry!

Amen