

Pentecost – Gospel

Not Yet, But Already

John 7:37-39

Pentecost

Analysis by Carolyn Schneider

37On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, 38and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’ ” 39Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive: for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

DIAGNOSIS: Not Yet

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Sukot – Life Is A Wilderness Wandering*

Jesus was in Jerusalem for the festival of booths, Sukot. It was the last day of this weeklong festival. All week the people had been listening to the book of Ecclesiastes, with its refrain: All is vanity. Everything ultimately leads to the same end: death. We are passing strangers on this earth, like the Israelites wandering in the desert for 40 years. Sukot commemorated this wandering and required people to eat their meals in makeshift tents throughout the week. On the last day of Sukot (the great day), the people did not go to their “vain toil,” but to the temple to celebrate Simchat Torah, “the joy of the Torah,” when the last reading from Deuteronomy is completed and the first reading from Genesis is begun. They would have

heard about Moses dying in the wilderness, and about his successor Joshua (which is also Jesus' name in Hebrew), full of the spirit of wisdom. They would have heard about a spirit sweeping over the waters when no new creation had yet come. Just as no promised land had been yet reached, all was still darkness and void. That is life, it's true.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *We Are Thirsty People*

The people who wandered in the wilderness were thirsty and complained until Moses made water flow out of a rock for them (Numbers 20:2-13). At subsequent times in their history, when the people were again thirsting for relief from their troubles, the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel promised that God would send them water in their wilderness, and that water would flow from the stones of the temple and make everything grow and live (Isaiah 12:3, 43:19, 49:10; Ezekiel 47:1-12). In Jesus' time, water was carried from the Pool of Siloam to the temple during Sukot to remind God and the people of this promise. But the people were still thirsty. No Paradise had yet sprung from those waters. Have we experienced one yet?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *The Spirit Is Not Yet*

The writer of John's gospel diagnoses the problem by saying, "As yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39). The people are poised between Moses' spirit, which provided good leadership for them in the desert but could not lead them home (Numbers 11:24-30), and the Spirit of wisdom in Joshua, which had yet to act (Deuteronomy 34:9), and God's Spirit, not yet giving the breath of life (Genesis 1:2). This divine Spirit would infuse life into a new creation only through the glorification of Jesus. "Glory" means mainly "a glowing reputation." Jesus will be glorified when he is held in high esteem, and this will be the sign that the Spirit has acted. But

Jesus is not yet glorified, not then and not now. Why does God wait, withholding the water, the Spirit, the home, the life?

PROGNOSIS: Already

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – God Glorifies Jesus

But John wants us to know that the Spirit will be poured out where Jesus is, so his Jesus calls the thirsty people to himself. Jesus may not yet be glorified by us, but God honors this Joshua and the Spirit of God's wisdom fills him already, marking him as the promised temple, a living rock out of which water gushes for the people and the land. John's Jesus embodies the world's purpose. He is the Word of God made flesh, exhaling creative words that take form in our flesh. Jesus is the seed of this new life, planted after Sukot, harvested and sacrificed at Pesach (Passover), and upheld and glorified by God at Easter.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – We Are Full Streams

By drawing into himself the biblical stories of God's creative actions, God's promises, and God's salvation, Jesus recasts these stories and re-forms the life of his people. This Joshua does not lead the people out of the wilderness by conquest, but transforms their life in the wilderness, making the desert bloom. Those who believe Jesus (perhaps with fear and trembling, since it is risky) look for the meaning of the world's story in his words and life. To drink his words is to take in his Spirit. The more one drinks, the deeper one finds this spring. The extra living water runs out of even our stony hearts and we become temples of the Holy Spirit, the home of Jesus' glory.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – The Wilderness Blooms

But if God is renewing this earth, then life is not all vanity. If we are springs in the desert, then it matters that we are

alive to water the earth and its people, literally and figuratively. Even as we tent in the wilderness, the Holy Spirit can work through us to give our neighbors good reason to glorify Jesus. Wherever that happens, the Spirit is at work in them, too. So the waters flow.