



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost Sunday

May 24, 2026

A Cup of Cool Water

John 7:37–39

³⁷ On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." ³⁹ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

There are times in life when we seem to be struggling with the same challenges over and over again. After a while we feel exhausted, frustrated, fearful, worrisome, and overcome with grief. We're thirsty, parched, dry as dust, and we need to realize that *in these very pews* God's Word acts upon our souls like a cup of cool water. In today's Gospel, Jesus says, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"

This is the Feast of Pentecost, when we rejoice in the divine gift of the Holy Spirit, who "proceeds from the Father and the Son" (Nicene Creed). Today Jesus proclaims to you, beloved, two great gifts from God that have been given through this outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The first is the gift of thirst. "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me," Jesus says. The second great gift is the eternal quenching of that thirst by the grace of God in Christ. So completely and abundantly is this gift poured out for you that, according to Jesus' own promise, out of your hearts "will flow rivers of living water."

Because of our fallen nature, and the dogged persistence of our sin, we tend to want to replace the cool water of God's refreshing Word with more "entertaining" substitutes, which is why we find it so easy to skip worship for the sake of other pursuits. It's why it's so easy for us to delay and eventually neglect our daily prayers, why we fall so quickly into the habit of sitting through the liturgy, going through the motions without thought, and coming to the Sacrament without the slightest preparation. The "rivers of living water" flow untouched and un-tasted by those who don't seem to understand that they're dying of thirst.

So God must make us thirsty. This is the first part of the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. Even Christians must be made to thirst before we have any interest in the "rivers of living water" God wants to grant us. This is partly why the Holy Spirit sees fit to make you keenly aware of the weight of your sins, and why they so burden your conscience. It's also why He allows you your own portion of mourning and crying and pain (Revelation



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21:4) – not merely as punishment, but to drive you to the well of His mercy, that you may drink.

This is not a physical thirst, mind you, but a craving of the soul – a spiritual thirst, a heartfelt desire, aroused by a distressed conscience that feels its sin, is aware of its weakness of spirit, soul, and flesh, and that fears God’s wrath and judgment. Luther calls this a “proper thirst” (AE 23, 267), for only after we have felt the heat for a time do we become interested in the cool water held out to us by our gracious Savior when He says, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” This Jesus spoke,” John says, “concerning the Spirit” – the Holy Spirit – “whom those believing in Him would receive.”

So, you received the Holy Spirit in your baptism, when He came to reside in you through the water and the Word. What does the Holy Spirit now do for you – apart from making you aware of your persistent thirst? He gives you your cup of cool water. Even more, God the Holy Spirit lives in you. Delivered to you through the living Word and the enduring promise of God, the Holy Spirit takes up residence within you so that an ongoing miracle will continue to take place in you. What is that miracle? Out of [your] heart – that same heart which you know to be blackened by sin and perpetually weakened by guilt; that heart terrorized by the fear of judgment – out of *that* heart will flow rivers of living water.

God's Word, God's Baptism, God's Holy Communion; these things are nothing less than the Holy Spirit's cup of cool water, by which He lovingly satisfies the thirst He Himself has created within you. God has declared that all your sins are forgiven, and when you hear that proclamation, it's as though He were pouring cool, refreshing water into your guilt-burdened, thirsty soul. In Baptism God adopts you to be His dear child. By speaking His adoption-promise to you, the Holy Spirit caringly refreshes you so that you need not feel ostracized and alienated from God. In Holy Communion, you take part in the death of the Christ who has risen again, through which you are given God's thirst-quenching promise that you also shall rise, never to thirst again.

"Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" With these Words, Jesus announces to you that the cool, refreshing cup of water that you receive here in worship is not only for you, but also for those whom you know in your life who likewise thirst, but do not yet know where to come and drink. Jesus says to you, "Out of [your] heart will flow rivers of living water." The great work the Holy Spirit does *in* you is likewise the work He does *through* you to and for your neighbor. Through you He assuages the thirst which the Law has created in others. The longer the Gospel is preached, the more effectively the thirst is satisfied, and the better it tastes to anyone who is thirsty.



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Therefore, those who believe in Christ and have received His refreshing water are in a position to console and refresh others with this same drink. This means you. You get to be a conduit of Christ's cool water, by telling others about the promise He has given and the forgiveness you yourselves have received. Don't keep it to yourself. Share it so that all who are thirsty may drink and be satisfied.

This is the Feast of Pentecost and it's an important day in the life of the Christian Church. Among us, it carries the added blessing of being the day our Confirmands, after years of study, are welcomed into the family of believers here at Trinity. Today you will drink for the first time, not only of His Spirit, poured into you in your baptism, but also of the cup of His blood poured out for you in His Holy Supper. May it strengthen your faith. And may the expectation of it draw you back here again and again as a regular part of your Christian life. As for the rest of you, take note of these young men. Befriend them. Encourage them. Inspire them with a Christian life well-lived. I know you will because you're very good at sharing your faith and encouraging one another. May we, by the grace of God, continue to remind one another that our Lord loves to make us thirsty, but that He also loves giving us something to drink. Drink deeply, dear saints. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen