

Readings: Acts 2;1-21 John 7;37-39

If anyone is thirsty, then come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture has said, streams of Living Water will flow from within them.

These are startling words. I imagine people being bewildered by this statement. Even if Jesus were to suddenly appear in this church and say these words, most of us would not know what to make of it.

As I was praying with these words in the week I felt myself challenged by them and thought, "How do I respond to these?" I guess it means to look at what you thirst for, and how you satisfy that thirst. So what do you thirst for? What do I thirst for? This is a question that takes a little answering. It is not just for a pint of beer or a cup of tea. That's not what I really thirst for. I thirst for money. Yes. I want to know that my family will be provided for and looked after and we will not suddenly find ourselves destitute. I thirst for significance. I want to know that what I do matters and means something to some one. I thirst for love. I want to be loved and to love in the intimacy and specialness of a family, to know and be known deeply for who I really am.. Security, Meaning and Love. I thirst for these.

Now I hear Jesus a little differently, as he speaks to what I really thirst for.

- If anyone desires real security, let them come to me. I will give them true safety, safety which really meets their need.
- If anyone is looking for meaning in their lives, come to me. I can show you the deep meaning of your life, one that will not change or become boring or irrelevant.
- If anyone longs to be loved, come to me. The love I will give you will not diminish, leave you or die on you, but will be present, healing and strong.

What is it that you thirst for? What are the deep needs which you are trying to get met?

You need to look at the places you put your energy, your anxiety and your time. These are the touch points of your needs, your thirst. Then you need to look at what is underneath each one, what is it really about?

Let me talk about how Jesus offers me security, meaning and love.

The first time I experienced the spring of living waters was when I didn't know what my needs were, or that I was in need. I was a student. I was away from home for the first time. I was studying physics. Because I didn't know anyone, in the midst of all those parties and events they deluge new students with, I was reading the Bible. I was reading the Gospel of Matthew. It seemed to speak right into my soul and I found myself lifted up into the love of Jesus. Everything changed. I had fallen in love with God. God was ultimate; nothing made me afraid. I was utterly safe and secure in God. My life was filled with meaning in the new direction of giving myself to God. My need for love, given and received, was wholly met and I was in a state of deep peace. That life-changing event so re-directed me that I am still largely living out of its direction and energy.

But *now*, how does this passage mean something to me?

It seems it is not enough for me to say that it meant some thing once, and that is the final answer.

There is another level, perhaps many levels, on which these thirsts of mine need to be met.

The security I seek will not be met in finances, no matter how much I might win in a lottery. Security is about feeling safe. Feeling safe is always something communal. It is about belonging. I think security is offered to me, and maybe to you too, in the body of the church. Here is a place, a body of people. The Church is a congregation, a lot of people in one place. Within this gathering there is a community. Community is that group of people who think of the church as "Us". If you think about the church as "Them", by the way, you need to know you are not actually a member yet! Those who belong in the community of the Body of Christ are the people who feel they belong to each other. Some people come to church for years and never join the community. They never let themselves trust and be trusted, they never open their souls and hearts, tell their stories and hear each other's. Only when you let yourself belong, truly and deeply, do you feel safe. You have to kind-of give yourself away into other people's hands to really find yourself safe.

The meaning I seek will not be satisfied by titles or anything else. Meaning also comes only from community. You know the meaning of your lives from the looks in people's faces. I have heard several people say, as they lay in hospital beds, facing their own coming deaths, that it is in their family and friends that their lives have meaning. For some, just a few, that family has been the family of the church too. It is not many who come to understand that they have brothers and sisters in Christ, real ones. Grandparents and children too.. I have found real "family" members in the church over the years, sisters and brothers unexpectedly have been given to me.

Both of these come out of love. The thing about love is that it needs other people. A love of chocolate is, at the end of the day, just not enough. It will never love you back. Love needs people. People are risky. Love seems to involve damage. I don't know why, it's just an observation. There are, in the heart, the very core of a community, hidden within a congregation, a few people who will risk loving you, and letting themselves be loved by you. They are rarely the ordained, they are not usually very obvious. But they are there. I think God puts them there, and they might be different for each person.

The spring of living water is hidden inside a church, inside a congregation, within a community. We tend to think all the places of security, meaning and love have been scattered and hidden. It is our life's work to find them and gather them up for ourselves, like some children's game of scavenger hunt. There is a story told in the Hebrew Scriptures about the Tower of Babel. Everything was all together, then God confused and scattered everything. Perhaps it is a story which tells our feelings well. It says, "Why don't we understand each other? Why doesn't everything flow well? Why am I afraid of the future? Why do I feel lonely?" The story catches all of that. On the day of Pentecost there is another story. The speech of humankind which was scattered is drawn back together. People can understand each other again, they feel things flowing again and there is a sense of delight, of excitement, of celebration and fulfillment. Something is being put back together. It seems to be "the way it is supposed to be".

When Jesus says "If anyone is thirsty, let them come to me, and I will give them springs of living water" I think the meaning and invitation are slowly clearing. It means come to church. Not just "turn up obediently each week", but really come, come and find the community inside the congregation. Get involved, put something in and you will start to get something out. Then find the Body of Christy inside the community. Find the people and the places where you can risk loving and being loved, the places where you can tell your story and hear someone else's. make Church the place where it becomes real. Then you will feel the Spirit begin to bubble quietly, or noisily up, giving you the life which is beyond mortality, eternal life.