

Welcome

Have you ever been in a TV station control room? It’s like being in the center of the universe. Earlier this week, I was invited to be interviewed on a news program. It was over zoom, so I had to click the link and join in. I sat there watching the news program happening - commercial breaks, other news stories going on. Then, a voice cut through to say, “Hello Rev Forasteros. Can you count to ten for us so we can do a levels check?”

There was a team on the other side of that zoom screen pulling all the different signals in - the anchor, my zoom feed, the commercials and turning it all into one coherent news program. Making it so that the anchor could interview me seamlessly for my little segment.

What seemed like an effortless, simple 5 min news segment took a ton of behind the scenes work and expertise.

I think this sort of control room is a pretty good analogy for how ancient people thought about what happened when they worshiped at their Temple. When you go back to Exodus and look at God’s instructions for the Temple, there’s a ton of Garden of Eden imagery - from the trees to the seas. That’s because they thought of a Temple as a sort of miniature model of the universe.

So God runs the universe from the throne room of heaven. And the Temple is the earthly version of God’s throne room. And worship was the way we partnered with God, the way we do our part to participate in the ongoing creation and sustaining of the world.

The Temple was the place where heaven and earth overlap.

If you were with us a few weeks ago, you may remember we talked about how, in John’s gospel in particular, Jesus refers to his bodily presence as God’s True Temple.

Which makes a sort of sense: Jesus is God and Human. He’s the very place where heaven and earth overlap. And on Easter Sunday, we talked about how Jesus’ resurrection represents the beginning of a new creation.

That’s a lot when some of us are just starting to feel the coffee kick in, I know. But I want to suggest as we begin worship today that what we’re doing here is participating with Jesus in making the world into something new, something beautiful and good and true.

Message

Today is Pentecost, which is the birthday of the Church. For the last 50 days, we’ve been celebrating the good news of Jesus’ resurrection. Here at Catalyst, the resurrection isn’t just a cool thing that happened one time, but as an ongoing reality in which we all get to participate. Jesus’ resurrection is the beginning of a new creation, a new reality that is coming into being all around us. We can learn to see this new reality breaking through the old through Jesus himself. By giving us the Holy Spirit to live within and among us, Jesus enables us to see and participate in God’s new world.

That’s why our series has been called DECODER RING. Jesus enables us to discern what would otherwise be hidden to us.

Today, at the close of this series, we’re going to bring several threads together from this series all together. This is going to be a sort of 30,000 ft celebration of who Jesus is, what the Holy Spirit does in our lives and in our world and how we get to be part of all of it!

Turn with us to [John 7](#).

Typically on Pentecost, we explore the story of the Holy Spirit coming - usually Acts, but also [John 20](#). This year, though, I want to back up and look at another time Jesus promised the Holy Spirit was coming. This is going to be about what the Holy Spirit *means* in the life of us as the Church.

I want to read three verse with you from [John 7](#), then work through the context together. We’re going to come back to these verses at the end of our gathering.

So here’s what Jesus does:

On the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, “Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, ‘Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.’ ” (When he said “living water,” he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet entered into his glory.) -- John 7:37–39 (NLT)

Okay a couple of things here:

First, Jesus is at a festival. He’s in Jerusalem at the Temple, and he’s at ‘the festival’.

Second, he’s quoting Scripture (which means the Hebrew bible). In particular, he’s quoting the prophet Ezekiel.

Third, all of this is a promise about the Holy Spirit he’s making, and it’s something in the future, because he “had not yet entered his glory” (which in John means he hasn’t been crucified yet).

So let’s talk about the Festival.

This particular festival is Sukkot, or the Festival of Booths. It has a couple of layers to it. First, it’s a Temple festival. It remembers the time Israel wandered in the wilderness, when they worshiped God in the Tabernacle, which was a portable, tent-version of the Temple.

Sukkot is also a water festival - rabbis said that during Sukkot, God determined how much water Israel would receive for the year.

The altar in the temple had two holes in it for drink offerings - one for wine and one for water. Wine offerings were made all year, but water offerings were only made during Sukkot. In fact, many Jewish people call Sukkot the “Celebration of House of Flowing Water”.

Finally, Sukkot lasted seven days. During those 7 days, Israel offered 70 sacrifices, which was their symbolic way of sacrificing on behalf of the whole world.

But the last day of the festival, day 8, was a bonus day. It is a separate festival called *yom tov* - the good day. It’s a day of celebration just for Israel. My rabbi friend said, “Sukkot is for the whole world. But on the last day, God wants to spend time just with God’s favorite people!”

So Jesus was at Sukkot - all Jerusalem has just spent 7 days offering sacrifices on behalf of the whole world, celebrating God’s love for the world and God’s liberating work for the world. And now Jesus is at the Temple, on the final day, the Good Day, of the Celebration of the House of Flowing Water.

And he quotes scripture. Specifically, he quotes a vision from the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel lived through the Exile, when the first temple was destroyed. He witnessed the apocalyptic destruction of God’s House.

The Jewish people saw the Temple as a microcosm of the whole of creation - like a sort of working model of the universe. They believed the Garden of Eden stood on the spot where the Temple stood, and that the primordial waters of creation flowed from the foundation stone of the Temple.

It was, for them, the literal and figurative center of the universe.

So you can imagine why it was so devastating to see God’s House, the Temple, destroyed. With that in mind, let’s read what God promises Ezekiel:

In my vision, the man brought me back to the entrance of the Temple. There I saw a stream flowing east from beneath the door of the Temple and passing to the right of the altar on its

south side. The man brought me outside the wall through the north gateway and led me around to the eastern entrance. There I could see the water flowing out through the south side of the east gateway. -- Ezekiel 47:1–2 (NLT)

[Map] A stream of water - flowing water, that primordial river water from Eden, flowing East out of the Temple. The man takes him along the river, then pauses to have him look back.

You know what’s East of the Temple mount? Here’s a satellite view. What do you notice? Yeah... a whole bunch of desert, then you get to the Dead Sea. A whole lot of nothing. Death. Wilderness.

Then this happens:

He asked me, “Have you been watching, son of man?” Then he led me back along the riverbank. When I returned, I was surprised by the sight of many trees growing on both sides of the river. Then he said to me, “This river flows east through the desert into the valley of the Dead Sea. The waters of this stream will make the salty waters of the Dead Sea fresh and pure. There will be swarms of living things wherever the water of this river flows. Fish will abound in the Dead Sea, for its waters will become fresh. Life will flourish wherever this water flows. Fishermen will stand along the shores of the Dead Sea. All the way from En-gedi to En-eglaim, the shores will be covered with nets drying in the sun. Fish of every kind will fill the Dead Sea, just as they fill the Mediterranean. But the marshes and swamps will not be purified; they will still be salty. Fruit trees of all kinds will grow along both sides of the river. The leaves of these trees will never turn brown and fall, and there will always be fruit on their branches. There will be a new crop every month, for they are watered by the river flowing from the Temple. The fruit will be for food and the leaves for healing.” -- Ezekiel 47:6–12 (NLT)

This is a powerful vision for Ezekiel, for a people who have been devastated by colonization and cultural genocide. God is not done with you. Something big is over the horizon, something that brings death from life.

We might call that... resurrection!

Song

So. Jesus is at Sukkot, a festival about how the Temple embodies God’s love for the world, and how God invites God’s people to participate in the world’s liberation.

This is the Celebration of Flowing Water. And Jesus is standing on the steps of the second Temple, quoting a famous vision about how God is going to bring resurrection to the whole world through this Temple. Except we know by now that when Jesus talks about the Temple, he talks about his body, not the building behind him.

So he looks East and he quotes Ezekiel’s vision about a river flowing out of the Temple to bring life to the world and he says this:

On the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, “Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, ‘Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.’ ” (When he said “living water,” he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet entered into his glory.) -- John 7:37–39 (NLT)

John reminds us that Jesus hasn’t been crucified yet, so this prophecy hasn’t *quite* been fulfilled yet, but Jesus is promising that a river of living water - the Holy Spirit - is going to flow from the Temple - his body, and it’s for anyone who is thirsty.

You don’t have to be Jewish.

You don’t have to be male.

You don’t have to believe the right things.

You don’t have to have a theology degree.

You don’t have to have a certain amount of income.

You don’t have to be a good person.

You have to be thirsty.

That’s it. Jesus’ life, his liberating work, it’s for anyone. Everyone.

You are God’s favorite people. *You* are the person God wants to be with on the Good Day.

Communion + Examen

Anyone who is hungry, come and eat! Anyone who is thirsty, come and drink!

When in the last week have I spent time connected to the Holy Spirit?

When in the last week have I ignored the Holy Spirit?

When in the next week might I be tempted to ignore or avoid the Holy Spirit?

How is God calling me to join in God's work in our world?

Assignment + Blessing

We're not done with Jesus' vision yet! The Bible ends with a powerful vision of the End of All Things, when God finally returns to establish peace and justice for all. And the vision the Revelation gives us of then end should sound very familiar to us by now:

Then the angel showed me a river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. It flowed down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations. -- Revelation 22:1-2 (NLT)

By God's mercy, the Holy Spirit makes us all part of this healing of the nations. This is our sacred calling, Church!