

# *“I’m Thirsty”<sup>i</sup>*

**Sunday, March 26, 2017**

**Fourth Sunday in Lent**



**John 19:28-29 (NRSV)**

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “*I am thirsty.*”

A jar full of sour wine was standing there.

So, they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth.

**This is the Word of God for the people of God.**

***Thanks, be to God.***

**[2<sup>ND</sup> Service: Affirmation of Faith]**

**[MESSAGE]**

“This Fifth Word is curious in light of Jesus’ repeated statements that he was the ultimate thirst quencher.

*Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty*, was a claim he made many times (John 4:14; 6:35). If you’re thirsty, come to me, he said (John 7:37).

**The Thirst Quencher is now thirsty?**

This “*I thirst*” must mean more than simply that Jesus is after all, not only divine but also human.

In his saying “*I thirst*, ” we may be at the very heart of his divinity, that which makes Jesus God, one with the Father, and so much **unlike us**.” <sup>ii</sup>

**Let us pray**...Lord, this morning we are reminded of your humanity and what you gave up for us. Help us to listen to your words and recognize your truth. In Jesus’ name, we pray. **Amen**.

The word “thirst” can be as simple as indicating a desire for a sip of water, or it can be as desperate as describing a life-threatening need.

Most of us have never truly experienced extreme thirst that brought us close to death.

Our thirst is generally about washing down a bit of food or keeping us going on a hot summer day.

It may be difficult for us to even imagine what desperate thirst might feel like.

What might it be like to thirst as desperately as Jesus does on the cross?

What we see on the cross reminds us that Jesus is truly “*the Word made Flesh*”; he is real, with real blood, flesh, and tears.

This is God incarnate.

Jesus was real; a human being who suffered and died just for you and me.

This is why he can thirst: *because* he is real.

So, we try to understand this word from the cross in terms that are easy for us.

We can remember when we were thirsty and we can try to empathize with Jesus.

We can even understand this story as being evidence of God’s choice to become human.

This is one more example of Jesus, fully God, becoming also fully human.

While we can sort of understand this from our perspective, there is still mystery surrounding the identity of Jesus.

But, there is a bigger issue here.

To thirst in Scripture means to yearn, to long for, to be desperate with desire.

Think about what Jesus said at the beginning of The Sermon on the Mount: “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...*” (Matthew 5:6).

You are blessed when you want God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, as if you were desperate for a drink of water after being in the desert for a week.

Psalms 42 says: “*My soul thirsts for God, the living God.*”

Remember the song:

*As the deer panteth for the water,  
so my soul longeth after thee.*

The idea here is to long for the righteousness of God as if your life depended on it.

It is thirst that must be quenched for your very survival.

C.S. Lewis suggests that the problem with many Christians is, not that they are bad people, just that they are *“too easily pleased.”*

We are too satisfied with things as they are; we are too adjusted and accommodated to the status quo – we are no longer *“thirsty.”*

We may view it as a sign of immaturity to be too eager, too excited about pursuing one’s faith.

Maybe you’ve heard the old saying: *“New Christians are too excited; they need to be locked up for a while to calm down.”*

People who are mature in their faith learn to step back, to live with balance and cool discretion.

We long for balance in our lives, and serene contentment.

But, that sounds like the way of Buddha, not Jesus who blessed those who thirsted for God like a thirsty animal.

Jesus wants our thirst to drive us, to move us, to draw us forward toward God.

## **But, what about Jesus' thirst?**

He isn't talking about *our* thirst; even though he wants us to empathize with him.

This story isn't about us, is it?

**God Almighty, the Son of the Father is thirsty.**

It makes sense: it's the middle of the afternoon on a very hot day in the desert and Jesus is hanging on a cross about to die.

Of course he's thirsty; but when they offer him a drink, he refuses it.

Maybe he isn't thirsty for water; maybe we are focused on the wrong thing here.

Maybe he was thirsty for his righteousness' sake.

Maybe he was thirsty for *us*.

That sounds like an accurate summary of the whole of Scripture: God has a thing for people; God is determined to be close to *us*.

From Creation, through the words of the prophets, the teaching of the Law, and the birth of Christ,

everything God has done has been about God's unquenchable thirst to have us.

That should change the way we think about God.

This is not some impersonal power, sitting on a judgement seat far, far away.

This is not a detached bureaucrat who carefully administers nature from a safe distance up in heaven.

Our God is utterly personal to us and unapologetically longing for us.

We read the Bible and hear stories of a God who gets angry, changes his mind, makes threats, promises, and punishes.

These are things that persons do; these are traits we use to personify our God.

It is one of the things we mean when we say, "*Jesus is Lord,*" or "*Jesus is God's only Son.*"

We mean that our God is shockingly personal, available, present, and close to us.

This in no way detracts from the Father's divinity.

There are plenty of “*gods*” out there who cannot risk getting this close to us.

We tend to be very hard on our “*would-be saviors*;” when they get too close, our scrutiny dissolves them.

We’d rather be our own gods so we might rule over ourselves.

Most fraudulent gods maintain their distance from our careful examination.

“This God thirsts for us, wholeheartedly gives himself over to us, unabashedly gets close to us.

You can’t get much closer to us, to the real us, than a cross.”<sup>iii</sup>

Jesus says, “***I am thirsty***”; he is talking about his longing for us; a longing so great that he gave himself up to satisfy it.

Whenever we study the Bible, it’s important that we understand how words are used in unexpected ways.

For example, most of us are familiar with Psalm 23 and its final verse:



*“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.”*

The Hebrew word translated as “*follow*” can also be used to mean “*pursue*.”

Now listen to that verse again:

*“Surely goodness and mercy shall **pursue** me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.”*

That changes the way we understand God’s “*goodness and mercy*,” doesn’t it?

It’s one thing to have goodness and mercy follow you around all your life; it is quite another to be stalked and tracked down by goodness and mercy *pursuing* you just when you thought you were lost in the valley of the shadow of death.

Most of us have never experienced real, brutal, life-threatening thirst.

Being thirsty for us has an easy solution – just walk over to the faucet.

We have so much at our disposal every day that it may be difficult to comprehend not being self-sufficient; we've been taking care of ourselves for a very long time, haven't we?

Yet, here in the shadow of the cross, we notice that we are not as self-sufficient as we think; we are simply self-absorbed.

Human beings have tried for centuries to climb all the way to God.

We have tried to be gods; and we have pretended not to need God.

So, what did God do?

God **pursued** us to the point of climbing down to be one with us.

The story of “*divine condescension*” began on Christmas and ended on Good Friday.

We thought we would have to somehow work our way up to God.

God surprised us by coming down to us; to the level of the cross; all the way down to the depths of hell.

He who knew no sin took all of ours so that we might be free from it.

Jesus asked the disciples: *“Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?”*

Our answer is a resounding, **“No!”**

We cannot drink this cup of crucifixion and death.

We cannot comprehend pouring out our blood as a covenant of love.

But, any God who wanders into humanity, any God who has the thirst to pursue us, cannot be too put off by pain and suffering, because that is how we treat our Saviors.

The God who pursues a thirst for us is ready to die for us.

At the very beginning of John’s gospel, we are told that the Word of God became human, moved into our space to live, and we beheld His glory.

Today, we see where this radical pursuit of us led  
Him: to the cross.

*“I’m thirsty” he says, “I yearn for you. Now  
behold, if your dare, where it’s gotten me.”*

As we stand here, staring at Jesus on the cross, we can’t  
help but wonder if all of this was necessary.

Was this the only way?

Is Jesus Christ, dying on a cross, really the only way  
for us to get to God?

That’s what he said, but is this really what he  
meant?

Then I look in the mirror and realize that, yes, there  
really is no other way for someone like me to  
get to God.

Let me be clear, I believe that is true for all of us.

You see, a detached bureaucrat running things like  
an absentee landlord, has no chance of reaching  
people like us.

We need a fanatic like Jesus, a rebel who is not  
afraid to get a little bloody fighting for us.

♦ We have demonstrated that we humans are an awfully cruel and fanatical bunch of folks sometimes.

We have willingly participated in a lot of blood and gore in the last several thousand years.

We have even gone so far as to murder the One who came to save us, to love us, and to be with us.

Because of all that, I just cannot imagine any other way to get to God except Jesus.

We're here today, at the foot of the cross, listening as Jesus says, "*I'm thirsty.*"

**He is thirsty for us. He longs for a relationship with us. Only our response can quench that thirst.**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

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<sup>i</sup> This worship series is based on the book, "*Thank God It's Friday*" by William H. Willimon, © 2006 by Abingdon Press, Nashville

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid., page 53

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid., page 57