

Thirsting for Forgiveness
John 7:37-39, Luke 7:36-50

Brothers and sisters in Christ, in this scripture passage we just read we see two people, a sinful woman and a Pharisee, who are seeking out Jesus. The Pharisee extends a dinner invitation to Jesus, and the sinful woman crashes the dinner party in order to get to Jesus.

Now, there is much that we can learn from the scripture passage – but to start us off this morning I just want us to notice that we are dealing with two people who are seeking Jesus.

Pause and let that sink in for a moment – people are seeking Jesus. That’s a bit of a rarity these days is it not?

I mean when we look around at our friends and neighbors, classmates and co-workers we see people who might be seeking education or work, or seeking to make a living...

Maybe seeking a good deal or a bargain, or seeking fun and excitement, seeking a little peace and quiet, or even seeking Mr. or Ms. Right - people are seeking for many things these days...

But when was the last time you knew someone who was seeking Jesus? And when was the last time they asked you about Jesus because they know you know Him?

As I said it’s a bit of a rarity these days.

But nonetheless, here we have the gospel of Luke telling us about two people who sought Jesus out – so it can happen.

And it certainly would be nice if it did – if people would come to us and say *“hey I know you are a Christian, can you tell me about Jesus? I want to get to know more about Him, who is He? and what is He all about?”*

Or if people would call up the church and say *“I’m looking for Jesus and I heard He’s at Valleyview!”*

It would make our purpose and calling to go and make disciples of all nations and share the good news about Jesus with people a whole lot easier if they were seeking Him wouldn't it!

But before we start bemoaning the fact that almost nobody seems to be seeking Jesus these days, let's ask why this Pharisee and this woman were doing just that...

Because there is always a reason as to why someone is seeking Jesus – that is why we have that bumper sticker that says *“Jesus is the answer!”*

But truth be told friends – we are so sometimes eager to give people the answer that we don't really know what their question is... in fact we can even forget that there is a question or a reason – it's just so obvious to us that we want to look for Jesus, and seek Him out, and follow Him – that's what we do right?

In fact some of us have been at this for so long we may have forgotten that we also had a question or a reason that caused us to seek Jesus out in the first place.

That's one of the goals of this series “Thirsting!” - to help us go back and remember what it was that caused us to seek out the person of Jesus in the same way that someone who is thirsty seeks out water.

Because you may remember that Jesus himself invited people to come to Him in this manner, in John 7:37 He said *“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.”*

Now I don't know if you've ever been really thirsty – personally I have a hard time remembering if I have ever been really thirsty because I think that if I ever was... I've always been fortunate enough to have water close at hand to quench my thirst.

But I remember a preacher I heard once give a personal example about being thirsty that has always stuck with me.

This preacher grew up on a farm in Alberta, and he was out working in the field one day and it was sunny and hot and before long he had worked up a sweat and he was starting to get thirsty.

The only problem was that he had forgotten to take his water cooler along – and for some reason I can't remember, he couldn't just hop back into his truck and go to the farm and get it.

Now the only water nearby was in a ditch on the edge of the field – and it was dirty and scummy and stagnant and it smelled... there was no way anyone would want to drink it.

But after toughing it out for a few hours, his thirst became so overwhelming that he caught himself considering if he could actually drink some that water...

And a couple more hours I guess his thirst had dehydrated him so badly that his brain wasn't functioning properly because he grabbed an empty two-litre bottle that had been rolling

around in the back of his pick-up truck, and put his t-shirt over the bottle to act as a filter and put it in that ditch and filled it up with that stagnant water.

And he remembers thinking that maybe if he just let it settle for an hour – all the sediment and dirt would sink to the bottom and he could just get a couple of sips off the top and that would be enough.

But his thirst was so great that there was no way he could just take a sip – he gulped that tepid ditchwater down like it was ice cold Rocky Mountain glacier water – and my stomach still churns just thinking about it.

But that is a great example of what it is like to be really thirsty...

And it is that experience of thirsting which Jesus taps into when He says "*Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.*" (John 7:38) and when He says to the Samaritan woman at the well "*Everyone who drinks this water will be*

thirsty again... but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst.” (John 4:13)

Now Jesus was obviously wanting to go deeper with this experience of being physically thirsty – because as much Jesus cared about meeting people’s physical needs, it was always done with the intention that it would open the door to meeting their deeper spiritual needs.

So when Jesus said *“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.” (John 7:37)* He wasn’t just inviting people to come and get a bottle of water from Him – instead Jesus meant and said afterwards *“Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” (John 7:38)* And as John explains *“By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.” (John 7:39)*

So Jesus is using physical thirst as an analogy to help people understand their spiritual needs, to realize that they have spiritual thirst which needs to be quenched.

Jesus wants people to come to Him to quench their spiritual thirst – because, as that pastor’s example shows, when you are so thirsty... even dirty ditchwater starts to look appealing, but that is not living water – that is water that will make you ill...

But Jesus is living water that quenches your spiritual thirst, to use the old English Jesus *slakes* your spiritual thirst, you can drink deeply of Jesus and He will satisfy that spiritual thirst.

And the spiritual thirst that we see in this morning’s reading from the Luke 7 is a thirst for forgiveness.

Now, I should just pause for a moment and clarify that the need for forgiveness is not the only kind of spiritual thirst.

And as we look at their need for forgiveness this morning, we need to realize that there are issues of conviction, guilt, and shame that are wrapped up in this as well.

And, we also need to realize that there are a number of different needs or reasons that can function as spiritual thirst.

Yes it's true that we all need forgiveness and we have to deal with guilt and shame - but it may not be the driving factor or the main thing that we are responding to or seeking to address in our lives.

Some people are just curious, others looking for meaning and purpose; others want to have a sense of belonging, or to know they are loved unconditionally; others might be seeking healing or deliverance and being set free...

There are many different reasons or needs that can function as spiritual thirst in someone's life - because brothers and sisters the Holy Spirit works in mysterious ways through these different reasons or needs to draw us, push us, prompt us, nudge us – even drive us... to seek out Jesus.

So, the first question for us this morning friends is *“what was the spiritual thirst the Holy Spirit used to make you seek out Jesus?”*

In the case of the sinful woman from this morning's scripture passage it would have been her knowledge of the Law of Moses which forbade sexual activity outside of a male-female marriage relationship.

It would have also been her inability to find a religious leader or teacher who could show her that God offered forgiveness when you broke His law, He offered a way to pay for your sins, and you could express your gratitude for being forgiven by then obeying and living according to the Law...

Instead the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law in Jesus' day had twisted this message backwards - so that the people heard the message that it was your ability to obey and keep the Law which determined your eligibility to receive the benefits and blessings of being God's chosen people, and kept you ceremonially clean in order to come into God's presence.

If someone like this sinful woman had come to them to confess her sinfulness she would have only found condemnation and judgement that she was not worthy of God because of how she had sinned.

But Jesus' ministry was about restoring God's grace and forgiveness; He corrected what the religious leaders had twisted. This is why Matthew says after Jesus finishes teaching the Sermon on the Mount *"the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law."* (Matt 7:28-29)

And this news about Jesus spread - that He was different from the teachers of the law – and this woman who was a sinner had heard about this and so she sought Jesus out as someone who could receive her confession and do something about her need for forgiveness.

And maybe you can relate to that? Because you can remember back to a time when you did something that was against God's law – you lied, you stole something, you beat

someone up, you abused somebody... or you were living a lifestyle that was not pleasing to God – you ignored him and did not worship Him or pray to Him ... you were the party animal with drinking and drugs and gambling... maybe you were an impaired driver... maybe you were just full of anger and hurting others all the time... or maybe like this woman you were sexually promiscuous - active outside of a male female marriage.

Whatever it was; you remember you knew this was not right, and that you shouldn't live that way and you knew God was not pleased with you and felt guilty and ashamed and that just kept you trapped in doing what was wrong.

But then you heard and you learned that you can confess your sins to Jesus with no judgement, and He will forgive them and take away the guilt and the shame and God doesn't see that anymore when He looks at you.

That was good news - and it's important as well brothers and sisters to remember how you heard this news about Jesus.

Take note that the woman in the scripture passage had also heard about Jesus, it says *“when she learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house...” (vs. 37)*

This woman had heard the word of mouth that had spread from town to town, and someone must have told her that Jesus was actually in her town and where he was.

So the second question for us this morning is *“how did you come to hear or know that Jesus is the one to quench your thirst?”*

Did you learn about Him from your parents, or another family member, or a friend? Or perhaps it was a Sunday school teacher, or a youth worker or a pastor? Or maybe you read about Jesus in a brochure or a Gideon bible in a hotel room?

But brothers and sisters the point of all this is that it is good for us to think back and remember that spiritual thirst which drew us to Jesus and remember how it was that we came to

know Jesus could meet that spiritual thirst because it rekindles our relationship with Jesus.

Just like long time married couples can experience a rekindling of the romance and passion they first had, when they rediscover what it was that first brought them together...

Just like long time performing artists can experience a rekindling of the creativity and passion they need for their art when they remember and get back to what drew them to their art in the first place...

We too experience a renewing of our faith and trust in Jesus Christ and a rekindling of our love for Him when we remember what spiritual thirst He met in us.

Because the truth is friends that regardless of where we may have started out in our relationship with Jesus Christ – after following Jesus for a while it’s easy to become like the Pharisee who sought Jesus out to invite Him for dinner, because the Pharisee expected Jesus would congratulate him

on being such a fine upstanding keeper of the law. There was no spiritual thirst in him – or he had forgotten why he was so drawn to be a student of God’s Word and the Law to begin with.

But if and when we remember and we rekindle our spiritual thirst which Jesus first quenched in us - then we turn away from that sort of self-righteousness which does not draw anyone to us... or to Jesus.

Because we remember that we were not able to quench our thirst, that other things we turned to did not quench our thirst – and there was nothing of our own self and our own efforts that could meet that need... and so we don’t put that kind of expectation on others either.

Does that make sense?

And brothers and sisters – the other reason why it’s important to remember, and do some of the hard work of reflecting back to determine what our thirst was... maybe a need for

forgiveness or maybe something else, is so that we can recognize and relate to that same spiritual thirst in other people and we might be the one the Holy Spirit has brought across their path and into their life who is able to tell them that Jesus is able to quench that thirst.

And you know – because you’ve experienced it.

But if you’ve forgotten it – or you haven’t experienced it - then you won’t recognize when the Holy Spirit is working in the lives of the people you encounter and you won’t be able to identify what they are thirsting for...

Let me show you a short clip from the TV show E.R. to illustrate this... (Atonement clip)

You see friends – only someone who has remembered how Jesus quenched their thirst for forgiveness, can identify or recognize that thirst in someone else...

Only someone who has experienced that in their own life can share that good news with someone else who is thirsty for it. Only someone who knows what it feels like to be convicted and guilty before God can explain to someone else how Jesus took our place and our punishment and takes away our sins.

Only someone who remembers how Jesus met their spiritual thirst- be it a need for forgiveness or anything else... will be effective in recognizing that thirst in others and being able to share naturally and honestly how Jesus quenches that thirst.

Consider how effective the sinful – but forgiven woman will now be as a witness when she returns to those whom she knows and who know her...

If there are any others who can relate to her situation of living in sin and wanting to confess it – she can easily, happily, and quite naturally tell them how Jesus is someone who offers forgiveness.

Now, keep in mind that there are different kinds of spiritual thirst and not everyone will experience a thirst for forgiveness as the primary driver to seek out Jesus Christ...

But perhaps today's message has made you realize that you've never experienced Jesus meeting any sort of need for forgiveness in your life – as a primary driver or otherwise.

If that's the case friends – even if it is not, as a helpful way to remember your spiritual thirst for forgiveness I would encourage you to read Jesus' sermon on the mount in Matthew chapter 5-7 and ask for the Holy Spirit to convict you of sin as you read it.

And then remember what we read this morning when Jesus said to the Pharisee "*whoever has been forgiven little loves little*" (vs. 47)

Which means... that as you become more aware of how much sin there actually is in your life and you start to become thirsty for forgiveness – then you are going to love Jesus more and

more - as He continues to forgive and forgive whatever sins you confess to Him.

And ultimately friends we will become convicted of the kind of pharisaical self-righteousness that hurts so many people around us by either judging them as unworthy or condemning them to rely on their own efforts - as we saw that hospital chaplain do in the video clip.

And the Holy Spirit will open our eyes to see how offensive and sinful this self-righteousness is before God and we will become thirsty for His forgiveness.

Friends, may the Holy Spirit so convict us of our own self-righteousness that we would come to Jesus and weep in repentance at His feet and then hear Him say to us *"Your faith has saved you; go in peace."* (vs. 50)

So brothers and sisters – stay thirsty and look to Jesus for your forgiveness. Amen.