

Thirsting for God
Acts 17:22-30, Psalm 63:1-11

Brothers and sisters, this month we have been looking back on our own lives to try and identify the spiritual thirst which the Holy Spirit used to first lead us to Jesus.

And we have looked at thirsting for forgiveness – which also encompassed dealing with issues of guilt and shame. We have also looked at thirsting for righteousness – which is basically about finding the answer to what makes us good people and whether we are good people.

These are two very basic spiritual needs which many people have and we can relate to, and reflecting on them helps us to recognize them in our own experience, and we are praying the Holy Spirit uses this to rekindle our initial desire and renew our passion in our relationship with Jesus.

But it also helps us start to recognize those same needs in the lives of others around us.

We start to grow more sensitive to recognizing spiritual thirst in other people when we are attuned to it in ourselves, and when we come across those who have the same kind of thirst that we do it is easy and natural for us to co-operate with the Holy Spirit by sharing how Jesus satisfied that thirst in our own lives.

Case in point – last week I was sitting in Waves Coffee shop working away on something and two ladies sat down at the table next to me and began talking. Now normally I'm able to concentrate and tune out the conversations that are going on around me...

But I don't know if it was the particular tonal quality of these ladies' voices, or if they were just "loud talkers" or the fact that I heard a few snippets of their conversation about "the conspiracy of big pharmacy and vaccines" but it turned into one of those situations where you are just totally distracted and pulled into their conversation when you really don't want to be.

And I was starting to get really annoyed and wishing they would quiet down or move somewhere else, or maybe I should – but I had got the comfy chair first and I didn't think I should have to move... when I realized *“Hey – here's an opportunity to listen for spiritual thirst”*

So instead of judging them for being a part of the “Volvo-mafia” I started listening to what was really behind their conversation and I heard betrayal of trust, I heard skepticism about authority, I heard a desire to connect emotionally, I heard a need for security, I heard frustration at being judged – or misjudged as it turned out and in that I heard the need to be perceived as good...

Anyways, there were all these aspects of spiritual thirst that I was starting to identify in their conversation, so that was good – but I just left it at that because trying to follow up on it by jumping into their conversation would have been rude and awkward, and counterproductive.

But sometimes friends, it's pretty easy to identify spiritual thirst because it's an outright, straight up thirsting for God... and sometimes someone comes right out and says as much.

Like we heard in the lyrics of the performance song this morning – *“Heaven let your light shine down... shine on me”*

Or what we sang during Lord's Supper from Ps 42:1-2 *“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?”*

And especially what David wrote in Psalm 63:1 *“You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water.”*

But, even when it is obvious that people are thirsting for God, it's still a good idea to ask why?

There are different reasons people seek God – and King David identifies a number of them that he has experienced personally, which have left him wanting more...

First, David has experienced the awe-inspiring-ness of the encountering the Divine. He says in vs.2 *“I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and glory”*

Friends can you imagine what it might be like to catch a glimpse of God and His power and glory? To actually see something of the omnipresent, omniscient, Almighty whom the Apostle Paul says is *“the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light...”* (1 Tim 6:15-16)

Friends if you have ever had your breath taken away by a mountaintop view, or marveled at the immensity of the open prairie sky, or been stunned into silence by the vastness of the ocean... then imagine what it would be like to catch a glimpse of the uncreated one who created all this.

God has His own glory and beauty in His own being which is different and unique from anything He created and it is an incredible experience of transcendence for humans to catch an actual glimpse of God.

Second, David has experienced being loved by God. He says in vs. 3 *“your love is better than life...”* I think we get close to understanding this experience when we are really really into something, so much so that we chose to identify ourselves through it with statements on T-shirts like “basketball is life – the rest is just details...” or whatever you would put there.

What is it like to be loved by God? Well... God’s love is life – the rest is just details.

Now the Hebrew word here is “hesed” which means God’s love as it is expressed in His covenant faithfulness.

So to be loved by God is to be bound into a covenant relationship with God, where God will always be faithful to own unbreakable Word to be your God and reveal Himself to

you. He will bless you and protect you and forgive you... and give you life.

Now there are expectations for you to keep in this relationship as well – but David knows that even when humans fail to be faithful, when we do not have “hesed” or “love” for God - at least God has “hesed” and “love” for us, our very life depends on it. Thus David can say *“your love is better than life!”*

Third, David has experienced the satisfaction and the fulfillment of doing what we were created to do – praising and glorifying God for who God is.

He writes in vs. 4-5 *“my lips will glorify you, I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands, I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth with praise you!”*

Maybe you know what this is like, maybe you’ve experienced it – but to try to put it into words is hard... The best way I think I can describe it what people seem to experience with

what we call celebrity worship – whether it be a singer, a movie star, a sports hero, even a politician.

They have fans and followers who sing their praises and pay homage... they tell everyone how terrific and awesome these people are... they scream and shout with joy whenever they get a chance to see them in person.

The satisfaction and enjoyment of this experience is what we begin to experience – or should experience – in offering praise and singing to God.

And fourthly, David experiences God helping him. God has been his protector, his supporter, and his vindicator just as He promised He would in the covenant arrangement.

David writes in vs. 7 *“Because you are my help I can sing in the shadow of your wings, I cling to you; your right hand upholds me.”*

Now If you know David’s story from the scriptures you know that as a shepherd he faced down and killed lions, and from

there he went on to slay the Philistine giant Goliath, and became a famous general for King Saul, he's survived King Saul's jealous attempts to kill him, and eventually became the King of Israel. (If not you can read all about in 1 & 2 Samuel)

And experiencing God in these ways that David has described in this Psalm is not a fleeting experience; the residual effects linger in us the way the feelings and memories of experiencing your first major league sporting event, or your first big rock concert or symphony or Broadway musical production does...

It continues to occupy your mind -the same way that an amazing person you just had the most incredible romantic evening with does... David writes *"On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night."* (vs. 6)

But for as much as this isn't a fleeting experience and the residual effects linger for a while they are not constant. And we eventually return to our everyday life with all its mundane and ordinary matters, with all its challenges, and

times of trial and testing – even suffering as well, and we become all too aware of the contrast between our present circumstances and our experiences of God and we long to return to them.

And this is exactly what David is expressing here, writing this Psalm in the wasteland of Judah... during one of those times when he longed to go back to those wonderful experiences of God.

"Earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you; my whole being longs for you in a dry and parched land where there is no water..."

There is always a reason why... and maybe you can relate to why David is seeking God, why David is thirsting for God.

But... maybe you've never experienced God in these kinds of ways. You've heard about other people experiencing God like this... but you haven't and you wonder if it's real and you want to experience it for yourself to see if it's true.

I think this is the experience of many of us who grow up in the Christian faith.

We are raised by God-fearing parents in Bible-believing churches and as children we rightly accept and believe what we are taught and told about God and who He is – but as we get older we start to see that those who are more mature in the faith seem to experience God in a way that we don't – and it starts to bother us.

I know that it bothered me, and although I wouldn't have recognized it as spiritual thirst at the time, I began to thirst for God when I was about 15 to 16 years old. I remember it as a feeling of restless angst and uncertainty about life that came on quite strongly when all the business of the day was done.

Often it would push me to just ride my bike around the neighborhood, not really going anywhere, sometimes stopping to sit on a park bench staring up at the night sky wanting to know... wanting certainty... wondering if what I knew was really real.

What was partly responsible for this was that I had been raised to obey to God's laws about what was right and what was wrong especially in regards to drinking and drugs and sex outside of marriage – but all of my non-Christian friends, and even a number of my Christian friends were happily indulging in these vices, and enjoying life very much, while I was not.

And I can remember thinking *“God if you are real, you need to show yourself to me – otherwise this is all a colossal waste of time and I'm missing out on a lot of fun!”*

Now I pray that if you are currently thirsting to experience God like other Christians seem to experience Him... that God doesn't have to reveal Himself to you the way He did to me...

Because being involved in a motorbike accident and injuring yourself is not a pleasant experience any way you look at it.

But God stopped me in my tracks one afternoon when I finally decided that I had had enough and I was going to see what it

was like living on the other side so to speak and I was injured as a passenger in a motorcycle accident.

And somehow God was present in the events and results of that accident in some unexplainable way because I came out of it with my thirst for God satisfied and a conviction that I needed to become serious about following Jesus.

Now I was far from being a mature Christian at that point, in fact I was pretty far from being a mature person all around – but I knew I had experienced God and that He had spared my life and spared me from what I might have done in disobedience and that I needed to follow Jesus in my everyday life... and I needed to tell other people about Jesus too.

I had experienced God and I knew – even without any study and seminary training - that in following Jesus other people would have an experience of God as well. Because brothers and sisters you don't have to go to seminary to hear what Jesus says to his disciples and to us in John 14:6-11...

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves."

And with a little bit of study and seminary training now I can explain how Jesus – as God incarnate – satisfies our thirst for God.

How Jesus is THE sanctuary where the presence of God dwells among us, and how Jesus sends His Holy Spirit upon us so that we become part of His body – and thus when we gather in

Jesus name to worship and praise him for being the faithful covenant keeper on our behalf, God Almighty is actually present among us in his power and His glory.

So everything that David thirsted for in Psalm 63 we can experience as **we encounter God in Jesus Christ** – so if you are still thirsting for God and wanting to experience Him for the first time... or like David you are longing to experience Him again as you have before...

Then come and gather with other Christians as we are gathered here, come and give praise and thanks and prayer to Jesus as to God – and pray that He will reveal the Father to you through the working of His Holy Spirit – and believe in faith...

As Hebrews 11:6 says *“anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”* Trust this and persist and persevere - God will reveal himself to you, perhaps not as you expect but He will and it will always involve Jesus Christ.

So when you hear people straight-up saying they are seeking God – it’s easy to identify that as spiritual thirst and if you have experienced that same kind of thirst you know exactly how Jesus satisfied that thirst in you and it is natural to be able to share that with them so their thirst may be satisfied as well.

But honestly, as I said a couple weeks ago, **it is rare to find people in our society who are out-and-out seeking God** these days. Definitely a contrast to the days of Jesus and Paul and the story from Acts 17 we read this morning where Paul wandered through ancient Athens seeing all their religious objects of worship, even coming across an altar dedicated “to an unknown god.”

But instead of judging our contemporaries for being so irreligious we need to learn to listen and observe them more closely – just like I had to do in the coffee shop - to hear the spiritual thirst for God that is truly there – **it’s just a bit more subtle and not always so easy to catch.**

It is there in how people speak of needing to find inspiration and wanting to be a part of something bigger than themselves...

It is there in all the adoration and attention which all the fans and followers heap on their favorite celebrities and sports heroes...

It is there in the pursuit of happiness, health and wellness – the good life – though being wise and disciplined in your lifestyle....

It is there in the pursuit of social justice and the call for governments to do something to make our society and our world a better place and solve our social problems and keep us secure...

It is subtle, but it is there because these are some of the ways in which we are created to experience God – just as David described for us in Psalm 63.

And Paul also alludes to this fact in Acts 17:24-26. *“He [God] gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history... and the boundaries of their lands...”*

You see friends, thirsting for God assumes a very basic truth; that we were made by God, in His image to be in relationship with Him and with His Creation.

But if somehow the relationship between God and humanity is broken – and we are not even aware that we are missing it – then we fill that spiritual need with experiences from the creation; breathtaking mountain views, glamorous celebrities, healthy bodies, making a difference and so on.

In Paul’s day and age, in ancient Athens, they filled that spiritual need with the worship of lesser deities – many gods and goddesses to make sure they you had all their bases covered so none of them got angry at them and sent calamity

on them because they hadn't honored them or they had offended them.

And Paul attempts to help the ancient Athenians see that their "religiousness" was really an expression of that spiritual thirst for God and create in them an awareness of that thirst so he might share Jesus as the one who can truly satisfy it.

He says "God did this so that they [humans] would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us 'for in Him we live and move and have our being'..." (vs 27-28)

So while the outward expressions of this seeking may have changed a bit from Paul's day - people would no longer say they are "religious" instead they would describe themselves as "spiritual" – it is still the same thirst all people have to know God, their creator and sustainer, and experience Him as they were created to.

And if are able to identify and recognize and relate to that thirst for God in the people who we work with, go to school with, and do life with – then we will have opportunities to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to share Jesus with them as the one who satisfies our thirst for God.

But only because brothers and sister we have rediscovered, or re-experienced as it were... that when we come to Jesus in faith – and pray to Him, praise and glorify Him, ask Him for whatever it is that we need, or eat His Supper – that somehow through the mysterious working of the Holy Spirit we encounter the God Father in Jesus because Jesus is in God the Father.

And in this experience we come to know – to really know – the truth and have confidence that in the very person and being of Jesus Christ, the Creator of All things has united Himself with humanity in such a way that humans always have a true way to the divine, that can never again be broken or interrupted by us... or by God.

So, brothers and sisters – as we have explored the thirst for God this morning, it may seem obvious to us that Jesus is the answer – and it is important to point and and explain how and why that is...

But what I hope and pray is that the Holy Spirit has helped you to understand a bit better, and more empathetically in ways that you can relate to - what it is like to thirst for God.

To seek out your Creator when you are not really certain that He is out there or will reveal Himself to us... to feel that need and emptiness that wants to be satisfied and nothing quite does it...

I hope and pray that we remember this, that empathize with it and that we will recognize it in other people so that we can work with the Holy Spirit and share Jesus with them – so that their thirst for God may be satisfied.

Amen.