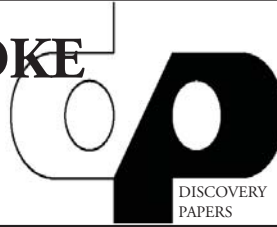




“NO ONE EVER SPOKE LIKE THIS MAN”



Catalog No. 20131215
John 7:31-52
18th Message
Steve Zeisler
December 15, 2013

We sometimes find ourselves out of step with our surroundings: bored at a carnival, lonely in a crowd. Or spiritually depleted during the holidays. Expectations contained in the familiar phrase ‘Have a merry Christmas’ can be especially difficult this time of year. David described an experience of emptiness in Psalm 63:1.

“O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you;
my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.”

Dry and weary and desperately thirsty—a powerful description of human need. In John 7, Jesus uses the language of thirst to call us to himself.

John 7:37:

**On the last day of the feast, the great day,
Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts,
let him come to me and drink.”**

It is moving to see Jesus in our mind’s eye calling out to pilgrims who are filled with both hope and longing ‘on the great day of the feast.’ But we should review a bit and set the context for this dramatic moment.

The Feast of Booths takes place in the Fall and lasts for a week. It draws on memories of Israel’s period of wandering in the wilderness. In Jerusalem during Jesus’ time the festival included a lamp lighting ceremony (recalling the pillar of fire that led the people) and a ritual of carrying water each day from the pool of Siloam into the temple (recalling the water that gushed from the rock at Meribah). The week-long feast came to a high point on the last day, and for the three days prior Jesus’ teaching had created its own wave of enthusiasm. To use the language of today’s social media, Jesus was ‘trending.’

Picking up the story in verse 32, we see that the Jerusalem leadership had given up on talking to Jesus and sent temple guards with handcuffs to arrest him.

John 7:32-36:

The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about him and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him. ³³Jesus then said, “I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. ³⁴You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come.” ³⁵The Jews said to one another, “Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? ³⁶What does he mean by saying, ‘You will seek me and you will not find me,’ and, ‘Where I am you cannot come?’”

Once again the Lord confounds his enemies (and issues a warning) by speaking of realities ‘the chief priests and Pharisees’ are blind to. His journey through crucifixion and resurrection will lead finally to ascension and he will return ‘to the one who sent me.’ We can make two helpful observations about the ensuing confusion on the part of these men who think they are in charge of events.

First, they try to discuss where he could disappear to, having only their limited imaginations to draw upon. Jesus is speaking of an everlasting reunion of the divine Father and Son and they consider Greece to be a far horizon. In their small world the Lord’s remarks are incomprehensible.

Further, Jesus’ statement ‘you will seek me but not find me’ is a warning. The door of opportunity is closing. He is not running away as a fugitive, but heading into world changing battle from which he will emerge to reign – Lord of heaven and earth. His enemies will not be able to find him because they have been left far behind. Luke records a similar warning.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’” (Luke 13:34-35).

The opportunity to choose faith in Jesus doesn’t

last forever. A seared conscience eventually becomes impervious to every appeal.

With this warning in view we come to the center of our passage. Jesus turns from the self-important elites and cries out to the pilgrims who long for a real encounter with God's truth.

John 7:37-39:

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" ³⁹Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

The offer made here has three stages to it. First we come to Jesus because we are desperate, characterized by our thirst, our need for life. The Lord receives us and gives us the living water that we long for.

Second, we receive the Spirit as a lasting presence residing within us. We don't need to repeat the pattern of desperation and rescue again and again. United to Christ we begin each day with the loving approval of God who is as near to us as our own heart.

Third we become a source of blessing to others who still thirst. Rivers of living water flow out of us as we give away what we have been given.

John 7:40-44:

When they heard these words, some of the people said, "This really is the Prophet."⁴¹ Others said, "This is the Christ." But some said, "Is the Christ to come from Galilee? ⁴²Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" ⁴³So there was a division among the people over him. ⁴⁴Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

John does not report on anyone who responded to Jesus' invitation to come to him, though it is likely that some did. Sadly, we read instead of a discussion that is all too familiar, an argument about arcane theological categories. Is this man a Messiah like Moses (the Prophet) or a Messiah

like David (Bethlehem vs. Galilee) or is he neither or both? The disputants are so focused on each other that all of them ignore the enormous gift being offered by Jesus.

John 7:45-52:

The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring him?" ⁴⁶The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!"⁴⁷The Pharisees answered them, "Have you also been deceived? ⁴⁸Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? ⁴⁹But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed." ⁵⁰Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, ⁵¹"Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" ⁵²They replied, "Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee."

In these verses we see clearly that proud self-importance is the primary characteristic of Jesus' enemies. The 'authorities' dismiss the temple guards as dupes. The ignorant multitude is declared to be accursed. Nicodemus (one of their own) is brushed aside with ridicule. They deride him as a Galilean, an unsophisticated bumpkin.

But those who occupy positions of authority are shown to be ridiculous as we hear them speak. Nicodemus' question is inherently reasonable and deserves a response. And the statement of the officers is the wisest word of all, 'No one ever spoke like this man.' The behavior of the authorities is self-condemning.

These stories in John 7 can help us most if we apply the offer of Jesus to ourselves: 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.' What is required for us to say yes to this offer?

First, we have to admit that we are thirsty. It is characteristic of fallen human beings to pretend, often lying to ourselves, that we are doing just fine. A two year olds insist, 'I can dress myself!' and ends up with shoes on the wrong feet. We carry this approach into adulthood, claiming competencies we don't have.

Jeremiah 2:13 offers a vivid picture of our dilemma:

"For my people have committed two evils:
they have forsaken me,
the fountain of living waters,
and hewed out cisterns for themselves.

broken cisterns that can hold no water.”

It is only when we can be honest about what is lacking that we will come to the Lord for living water.

We must also recognize that Jesus’ offer is an act of sheer grace. We cannot make ourselves well and we cannot pay for the gift he offers. Our contribution is to say yes with gratitude, to stop hesitating, to ‘come to me.’

Finally, we should observe that the Lord does not promise to alter our life circumstances. Changes in relationships, employment, home and health may occur as the Spirit gives our life new direction. But there is no assurance of this. His offer is to slake the thirst of our hearts, providing ‘living water from within’.

We began our study with David speaking of a thirsty heart in verse 1 of Psalm 63. We conclude with the three verses that follow – the King’s description of a God’s gift, a life overflowing with living water.

²So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.

³Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.

⁴So I will bless you as long as I live;
in your name I will lift up my hands.”