

Acts 2. 1 – 21
John 7. 37 – 39

The Day of Pentecost

Fr Alex

As you may know I love going for long walks in the beautiful English countryside – God’s own countryside, of course, round here! And all this warm and sunny weather gives me access to one of life’s simple pleasures: walking on a hot day, next to running water.

There’s nothing like it, after traipsing up and down hills, across baking farmers’ fields, to descend into a valley and hear the babble of a flowing stream.

The cool breeze that even on the stillest of days seems to come out of nowhere wherever there is water running. Stopping to take a drink, and bathe the weary feet. That’s pretty much all I have planned for tomorrow’s day off.

Water, in many ways, has been the theme of this long journey through Lent and Eastertide that began 95 days ago; forty days of Lent (not counting Sundays), and 50 days of Easter, now brought to a close on Pentecost, which means ‘fiftieth day.’

If you can remember that series of readings we heard from St John’s Gospel on the Sundays of Lent. First, Nicodemus, who was told that “no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of *water* and the Spirit.”

Next, Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well in the hottest part of the day, and asks her for a drink; in return, he offers her “*living water*.” “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”

Then, Jesus heals the man blind from birth, by sending him to go and “wash in the pool of Siloam.” When the crowd asks the man what has happened, he said, “I went and *washed* and received my sight.”

Finally, we heard the dramatic story of the raising of Lazarus. There’s not an obvious reference to water in that narrative; however, you might remember that Jesus is some distance away from Bethany, the home of Lazarus, when he receives the news that his friend is ill.

So where is he? The verses just before tell us that Jesus had gone “away across the Jordan to the place where John had been *baptizing* earlier ... and many believed in him there.”

Jesus comes from the place of baptism – the place of his own baptism, in the waters of the Jordan, when the Spirit descended on him – and he reveals his power over death itself.

Shortly afterwards he himself will go down into the deep waters of death; but he will rise again into new and wonderful life.

We have followed him on this journey ourselves, when we were baptised in the font – the symbol of Christ's tomb – and died to the old way of sin and death, and rose to the new life of faith.

And we've called this to mind on every Sunday in Eastertide; we have begun at the font, the tomb; and we've been sprinkled with the baptismal water. Water, as the accompanying prayer reminds us, that "brings life and freshness to the earth." We have prayed that God will "cleanse us from our sins, keep us faithful to our baptismal promises, and renew the *living spring* of life within us."

And so we come to today, the last day of Eastertide. And in that tiny little Gospel reading we hear it all summed up in the great promise of Jesus: "'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive."

Jesus says this "on the last day of the festival, the great day." This was the Festival of Tabernacles, which ended with a great day of prayer and celebration. One of the rituals involved priests pouring water and wine around the altar of the temple, calling to mind the prophecy of Ezekiel, of the river of life flowing from the temple in the New Jerusalem. At the same time they would pray for rain for the harvest, and for the resurrection of the dead. Water, and new life, have always gone together.

Standing in the temple, perhaps at the very moment these priests were solemnly pouring water and wine around the altar in thanksgiving for God's blessing and in hope for the future, Jesus proclaims that *he* is the source of the water of life: and he invites all people to come and drink of it.

And, soon after, he will pour out wine, too, in his blood on the cross; and he will become the resurrection that the people had prayed for. He will be glorified in death and in life, and will send the Spirit to share with us that same glory, and that same resurrection life. Out of *our* hearts, Jesus promises, will flow these rivers of living water that are the Spirit.

This gift was given to us, of course, at our baptism, when we followed Jesus through the waters. But today's feast provides an opportunity for us to 'test the waters' of our faith, so to speak.

Is our life like that beautiful, bright and babbling brook that I hope to find on my walk tomorrow? Is our faith fresh, living; and flowing out to bring life to those around us?

Or is it a different kind of water? Is it a bit stagnant; not going anywhere; murky with cares and desires that are not of God? Is it water that, instead of bringing "life and freshness," might bring a spiritual sickness if someone were to drink of it?

Or is it different again – has it become dried up like an empty pond? Cracked and parched, and devoid of life?

The waters of our faith might become like all these and more at different times of our life, in the different challenges we might face. But the promise of today is that, no matter what, the Spirit is constantly being poured out on us; and the Spirit's waters can cleanse the filthiest stream, and fill to overflowing the emptiest pool.

It can renew us and refresh us and bring us into an abundance of life; if we follow the example of the apostles and unite ourselves to the Spirit in prayer – and to one another in the Church that Christ brought to birth on this great day.

As we celebrate today, may we recommit ourselves to Christ, and to his Church; and may we seek that living water of the Spirit, always. Amen.