

Not everyone qualifies for Jesus. This is true. When it comes to Jesus Christ, the Savior of all people – receiving Him, coming to Him, accepting Him, however you want to say it – not everyone qualifies.

In Matthew 11 Jesus invites all “*who labor and are heavy laden*” to come to Him for rest. In John 6 He is the Bread of Life for all who hunger. And here in John 7 He puts it this way, “*If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.*”

Jesus is for all people. He is for you and for me. He does not disqualify anyone, no matter who they are and how they have lived. It’s us. It’s we the people who disqualify ourselves. If we do not labor, being heavy laden with burdens, we will not come to Jesus for rest. If we are not hungry, we will not receive Him as the Bread of Life. And if we do not thirst, we will not come to Him and drink.

After Jesus cries these words, yes, shouts them in the temple of Jerusalem, in the verses that follow we read that some of the people there do indeed come to Him. Others are very doubtful about who He is, and these do not come. And still others try to put Him under arrest. Jesus disqualifies none of them. He cries these words of invitation out to all who are there. And some do come to Him and drink. But the others disqualify themselves. They, quite simply put, are not thirsty.

This is not physical thirst. It’s spiritual. The thirst of the soul. Jesus invites to Himself not those wanting a glass of wine, or a beer, or even a glass of water. He cries out these inviting words to those who have a distressed, wretched, even terrified conscience; who have a frightened heart; who feel their sin and its weight upon them; who fear God and His wrath, His judgment, and death. To be anxious in these ways is to be thirsty. And these Jesus invites.

Yet He knows full well that only some are thirsty in such ways. “*If anyone thirsts...*” He cries out. The invitation is in the singular. Not “Ya’ll come to Me and drink.” Or, as they say in the South, “All Y’all.” No. “If any one thirsts, let him, let her come to Me and drink.”

Martin Luther tells the story of a certain monk by the name of Hilarion. For 83 years this monk had lived a very pious life in a cloister. When death approached, he was frightened. But he said, “My soul, why are you so fearful? Did you not serve God for 83 years?”

This man had no use for Jesus. He was content to drink the water of his own pious life. He quieted his fear of death and the judgment of God with his 83 years of service as a monk.

You know who could not have done that? The thief on the cross. With death fast approaching, how would he have fared had he said to himself, “You lived the best you knew how. Don’t worry about death and the Judgment.” His sinful life as a criminal offered him no refreshing water to drink. But Jesus was there next to him. This man, unlike the monk, turned to Jesus to drink. And Jesus poured out the water of eternal life into him: “*Today, you shall be with Me in Paradise.*”

Better for this thief that he had such a wretched past. Perhaps if Hilarion had not been so pious in his 83 years, like the thief, he might have turned away from his own life to Jesus, and he, too, would be in Paradise.

Maybe that's what we need. Some good, old-fashioned sinning. Maybe we need to go out and sin boldly, perhaps as a thief. And then we would have a wretched, guilty conscience. We would thirst, in other words. We would surely, would we not, come running to Jesus to drink.

Yet there was another thief next to Jesus. His past life was as wretched as the other one. But this man did not turn to Jesus. He did not drink the water Jesus had for him.

No, my friends, our lives are sinful enough. We do not need to heap more sins upon ourselves. The mere act of sinning will not make us thirsty. It's God's accusing Law which strikes terror into our hearts. It's God's Law, the Ten Commandments, that makes us thirst for Jesus.

And on this Pentecost Sunday I can most clearly point to the Holy Spirit who works upon your heart and mine as the Law of God is preached into our ears. He shows us how pitiful our lives truly are; that there is nothing for us to drink even if we had 183 years of godly living.

But how comforting to hear the good news of Jesus. And through the good news, the Holy Spirit brings us to our Savior, to the only One who has the water we need because He, and He alone, hung upon the cross to purchase forgiveness, life, and salvation for us and for all sinners.

Here is the water for which you thirst. It's not in your godly life. It's in your baptism. It's in the body and blood of Jesus on the altar for you. It's in the holy words of absolution which the Holy Spirit puts into your ears.

*"If anyone thirsts..."* says Jesus. This is in the singular. It's very personal. He is speaking to all of you, and yet to each one of you individually. If you are thirsty, if you have a wretched past, if you have sins that need to be forgiven, then here is the water Jesus gives you: you are forgiven. He took your sins to His cross. He paid the penalty for you. He satisfied God's wrath. There is no judgment against you. Jesus was judged in your place.

And when death comes, do not be fearful. Nothing, not even death, can separate you from Jesus' love for you. You, like that thief, will be in Paradise with Jesus. Not because of how you have lived. Because Jesus lived, suffered, died, and rose again for you. No sin that you have done can keep you out of heaven. Your sins, all of them, are forgiven for Jesus' sake. This is water worth drinking. Amen.