

**John 7:37-39**

Since my wife isn't here, I can talk about her as long as you promise not to tell her when she and Brian return from visiting Sarah in Kansas. The amount of water she drinks puts me to shame. If it's not a gallon a day, I'm sure it has to be close to it. She has been a heavy drinker now for some time, and I must say that her habit is rubbing off on me. Watching her drink so much water, I now drink much more than I used to.

Jesus understood the importance of drinking water. He cried, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink." Now notice that Jesus does not simply say, "Come to Me and drink." He says, "*If anyone thirsts*, let him come..."

Our human body is designed in such a way that it needs water even when we are not aware that we need it. Anyone can feel thirsty after working out in the hot sun. We drink a lot of water very quickly at such times. But when we're not perspiring, when we're not active, not out working hard, our body deceives us. It still needs water, but we are not thirsting for it, and so it's easy to go through the day without hardly stopping at all to grab a glass of water.

The same is true of us in a spiritual sense. We need Jesus, the Water of Life, regularly even though we may often feel as though we are doing fine without drinking of Him. Days may go by and we do not crave the water that refreshes our soul in the pages of Holy Scripture. And so we get into the habit of barely sipping that Word of God every now and then.

Some Christians, who were raised on the living Christ who refreshes us here in His House of Worship, get into the habit of drinking less and less of Christ here, so that many weeks and months go by and they are not even aware that their eternal soul is dying of thirst.

"If anyone thirsts," says Jesus. He knows the sinful habits we tend to create for ourselves. He knows that our eternal soul thirsts for Him even though we may not know it. There are some who have good habits. My wife is in the habit of drinking from her glass of water throughout the day even though she is rarely thirsty. Watching her, I now keep a glass of water by the sink. Whenever I walk through the kitchen I force myself to take a drink, and the more I do this, the more of a habit it's becoming.

Some of you have made this kind of thing a spiritual habit for yourself. You have made the reading and study of God's Word a habit. And so you are in the Word regularly, even on those days when you're busy--when you have no time to drink. You have made it a habit of being in church whenever Jesus is here to serve you. You have made this a habit of the highest priority. You drink regularly of the living Christ and would not even consider refusing to drink from His cup whenever it's offered here for you.

But Jesus does not just love His Christians who faithfully drink of Him. He also loves those who are not very thirsty. And He does not want them to die of thirst apart from Him. And so Jesus does something wonderful for us. We may not think that it's too wonderful, but it is. He allows us to become thirsty. The hot sun can drive a person to his bottle of water. So Jesus allows His Christians who are not feeling much of a thirst for Him to become parched and dried out from troubles, pain, and suffering. He allows such problems to come into our lives so that we thirst for our Lord in ways that we were not thirsting before we had troubles.

Just as any good father does not shelter his son from hard work, or from the sweat, and aching muscles, and the unbearable thirst that comes from such work, so God does not keep troubles from coming to us, for without them we may not thirst for His Word and Sacraments. Without struggles, pain, and sufferings we may lose the habit of drinking our Savior often.

We should not groan, therefore, when troubles come in life. We should not pity ourselves, or complain that God is forsaking us. Just the opposite. Whatever suffering you and I are enduring, see the grace of God behind it. He allows it because of His love for you. He desires greatly to keep you thirsty in your life; thirsty so that you have the habit of drinking Jesus regularly. And whoever is thirsty, Jesus promises that he or she can come to Him and drink. He will not turn you away. All who come to Him may freely drink of Him.

It was that way in the desert when God's people complained to Moses. "We are dying of thirst," they cried. And through Moses, God brought water out of a rock for them to drink. They did not deserve that water. They were utterly sinful. They had despised God and turned away from Him. But God refused to turn away from them. He gave them water to drink.

As God brought water out of a rock in the Old Testament, so for us in the New Testament He brings us true, living water out of our Rock who is Christ Jesus. His words are gracious and they refresh our soul. His cup is the cup of salvation. To drink of Christ is to receive from Him relief from the burden of our sin, comfort, joy and hope. And all this is for you no matter how you have lived. Even though, like God's people of old, we have despised Him and turned away from Him, Jesus says to you today: If you are thirsty, come to Me and drink. He is not here to punish you for your sins. He was punished in your place on a cross. He is here to forgive you...and He does. All of you He forgives.

He gives you living water. He who died for you, but now lives, comes to live within you. He puts His Spirit in you as His words of grace and mercy come into your ears. And the more you drink this living water, the more you desire it, the more you thirst for it, and the more your faith in Christ is strengthened, the more assurance and confidence you have in your living God.

"If anyone is thirsty," Jesus says. As He was dying on the cross, Jesus cried out, "I thirst." But His thirst was not for water; His thirst was for you. His thirst was to set you free from your sins. His thirst was to remove God's curse from you. His thirst was to bring you to God in peace through His own blood. Jesus' thirst was quenched. He did what He set out to do. And now He wants you to thirst for Him. Not just now and then...always, daily, weekly, all your life. And to everyone who thirsts, Jesus gives that one living water to drink.

I think that, for us, we all learn from the example of others. As I learned by watching my wife's good drinking habits, and so I am now developing the same habits, there are Christians who are watching you. Perhaps they are weak in their faith. Perhaps they are Christians who are dying of thirst. And as you are in the habit of drinking Christ often, they can learn from your good habits. Because Jesus is as much for them as He is for you. "Anyone," He says, "Anyone who is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink." Amen.