

## Come to Jesus and Drink!

John 7.37-52

On the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus stood and proclaimed a solemn truth: *Anyone who 'drinks' from Me – who believes in Me – from him will flow rivers of living water!* This short proclamation was pregnant with meaning on that day, and it still is for us today.

Getting to know the Feast of Tabernacles

- God commands the Feast (Lev. 23.33-43; Deut. 16.13-15)
  - Tishri 15-22 – Seven days plus one – harvest complete
  - Israel's 40-year 'camp-out' – God gave manna and water
- Blessing and a warning: Zechariah 14.8, 16-19
  - Nations celebrate Feast in Jerusalem in the kingdom
  - Those that do not come to Jerusalem will have no rain
- Feast became occasion to pray for early rains
  - Daily "drawing of the water" ritual – reminder and prayer
  - Last day – *Hoshanah Rabbah*, climax of Feast!

Jesus Invites *Anyone* to Drink! (37-39)

- The offer was – and is – open to all!
- All who believe receive the Holy Spirit!

The response then...and today

As John 7.2 indicates, the context for this narrative (chapters 7-9) is the Feast of Tabernacles, which was celebrated in Jerusalem in the autumn (late September-early October) after the harvest was over. The biblical establishment of this feast is found in Lev. 23.33-43 and Deut. 16.13-15. Over centuries, ceremonies evolved that were related to remembrances of the wilderness wandering or promised blessings. One such ceremony was the Pouring of the Water, which is the backdrop for John 7.37-52.

The Feast of Tabernacles reminded Israel of their 40-year "camp-out" in the wilderness – hence, the building of 'booths' (*sukkah*) made of willow and olive branches, temporary dwellings in which they lived for a week. But it also reminded them how God provided for them. For example, He gave them water! God made bitter water sweet at Marah (Ex. 15:22-25); He made water flow out of the rock for them at Horeb (Ex. 17.6). When Israel entered the Promised Land, God linked attendance at this feast with His blessing of an abundant harvest (Deut. 16.15). The autumn rains were vital to the next year's crops, so the Feast of Tabernacles became a time to pray for rain. These prayers were dramatized by a solemn ceremony, called the Pouring of the Water.

Each morning, a priest carrying a golden pitcher led a joyous procession from the Temple to the Pool of Siloam. There, he dipped water, reciting Isaiah 12.3, "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." The procession then returned to the Temple and walked round the altar, singing Psalm 118.25, "Please, LORD, please save us. Please, LORD, please give us success." The priest ascended the altar and poured the water from his pitcher into a silver funnel that flowed into the ground. At this moment, everyone fell silent, reflecting on the prayer for water.

On the last day of the feast, this ceremony was intensified. The priests and people walked around the altar seven times, singing the prayer of Psalm 118.25, and when the water was poured out, there was silence. It was following this ceremony that Jesus stood and shouted, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." Does this enhance your understanding of the significance of Jesus' words?