

Word Five

I Thirst

John 19:28-29

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished,
he said (to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty."
A jar full of sour wine was standing there;
so, they put a sponge full of the wine
on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth.

We try to keep
a pretty regular routine at our house
when it comes to going to bed.
Tripp is in charge
of the flossing and brushing of teeth
and I'm usually picking up
and getting the nightly meds,
nighttime sleep gummies.

We try to get the girls settled in,
our other dog Rumor, (if you are paying attention)
picks her spot on someone's bed,
we find The Magic Treehouse Book
we have been reading and then
...here it comes...*Mom, Dad...I'm thirsty.*

I'm pretty sure
this is a diversionary tactic;
this whole waiting until bedtime,
waiting until we are all settled
and then remembering how parched they are.
And if you try to offer them yesterday's water
...oh no, that won't do—
it's old water.
And here's the other thing,
It's never just water.
*It's, Mom, will get me a glass of water
with crushed ice and a little bit of lemon juice?*
These children have me confused
with another mother, I tell ya.

I know my kids aren't really *that* thirsty.

They, like most of us
have never known real thirst.

We've never been Hagar;
under the heat of the desert sun,
desolate and desperate,
trying to shield her child
all the while thinking,
this could be the end...

We have never endured 40 days
of fasting while being tormented and tempted
out in the lonely wilderness of Judah,
exhausted and fraught
thinking
I know this will soon end...

And of course,
not one of us can even fathom
the agony of crucifixion;
the slow torturous suffocation and dehydration,
the humiliation and pain
that was the end.

Here now, the fifth word
in our series on the Seven Last Words of Christ.

After this, when Jesus knew
that all was now finished,
he said (to fulfill the scripture),
"I am thirsty."
A jar full of sour wine was standing there.
So, they put a sponge full of the wine
on a branch of hyssop
and held it to his mouth.

Jesus throughout the Gospel of John
has always been in control.
He has known that his hour

had not yet come;
knew that his time was at hand;
he knew that the father had given
all things into his hand,
and that he had come from God
and was going to God...
and right as he is about to be arrested,
John tells us Jesus,
[knew] all that was to happen to him...

All this points to the fact that Jesus, ***knew!***

Unlike us, from the get-go,
Jesus already knew
what lay ahead for his life,
and how his ministry would play out.

He tells Pilate plainly,

you have no power over me
unless it was given to you from above.

And yet, John tells us,
from the cross,

Jesus does something that seems unscripted,
*[even though John is quick to add that it was to
fulfill scripture]*

he does something so
not God-in-control-like,
so not I know what will happen,
he does something
so very human,
so vulnerable.

He asks for something to drink.

As Stanley Hauerwas puts it,

“We so desperately want Jesus
to be an all-around good guy,
but in the Gospel of John
he seems so driven,
so, unlike us.

'I thirst' is at least
some indication
that he had a normal,
human side."¹

Jesus was parched.

The one who gives living water,
hangs on a cross,
thirsty.

The one who will bring forth
a spring of water
gushing up to eternal life,
now in his last breaths,
fulfills scripture,
saying, I am thirsty.

Most scholars believe
John is drawing a correlation to Ps. 69.

¹Save me, O God,
for the waters have come up to my neck.

²I sink in deep mire,
where there is no foothold;
I have come into deep waters,
and the flood sweeps over me.

³I am weary with my crying;
my throat is parched.
My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God.

⁴More in number
than the hairs of my head
are those who hate me without cause;
many are those who would destroy me,
my enemies who accuse me falsely.

¹ Stanley Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Christ* (Brazos Press, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2004) pg. 74

...
²¹They gave poison for food,
And for my thirst
they gave me vinegar to drink.

This moment on the cross,
where Christ,
who is still in control,
says he is thirsty,
plunges us into the Incarnation.²
How, you might ask?
This isn't Christmas H,
this is Easter.

This mystery of mysteries,
the Incarnation—
how God can be fully human
and **this human** can be fully God
...is on full display.
And deeper still,
this incarnate Lord
is willingly dying on a cross.
This is a mystery
of a God who is 100% human
and a human who is a 100% God
is the mystery of incarnation
that has become a doctrine.

We have made doctrines
into intellectual ascents
things that we can believe in
with our logical minds.
As we think of it, the doctrine of incarnation
allows us to simply agree,
that this person Jesus,
is also God,
and is on the cross, dying.

² Ibid. pg.75

We don't usually
ponder the mystery of God, dying before us.
We aren't keen on that event,
being a space of confusion,
hurt, fear, anxiousness,
and abandonment.

Because we use doctrine
to make a deeply mysterious and moving event
into a simple promise
that we all will agree with.

But this is a mystery.

It is mystery
that we have grown so accustomed to
that we have forgotten
its peculiarity.
Archbishop Rowan Williams claims,
"we must remember
the point of doctrine
is to hold us still,
to create a depth in us,
"a space for radical change
in how we think of ourselves
and how we act."³

Holding still,
can you hear Jesus saying,
I am thirsty
and make space for mystery
of an incarnate God who needs a drink?
Can you make space for Jesus
to be fully human and fully God
and yet dying?

Perhaps this is the moment of shifting.

³ Ibid pg. 75-6

The fount of living water who himself, thirsts,
invites us, to be the ones to quench his thirst
and therefore, the thirst of the world.

Can we act and be those who offer water:
quenching thirst in the wastelands
for mothers and babies;

quenching the thirst for those
who haven't had access to good, nutritious food
and clean water for too long;

If we hear brothers and sisters crying out...

¹Save me, O God,
for the waters have come up to my neck.

²I sink in deep mire,
where there is no foothold;
I have come into deep waters,
and the flood sweeps over me.

³I am weary with my crying;
my throat is parched.

...can we point to the source
where we drink from
and say to others,
here is the cup,
poured out for you?

I think my girls are right.
Yesterday's water won't do.

This Lent, this Easter,
we will need something fresh and new.
Let's embrace mystery,
and depth and space,
and see the One who is in total control,
fully human, fully divine,
a wellspring of living water,

and let's believe,
not just with our minds,
but with our whole selves
because the incarnate Lord
has told us
that out of the believer's heart
shall flow rivers of living water.