

I Thirst

I have this as Jesus' 5th Word from the cross. Others have it as 4th or 6th. That's because only John records it, and so you have to decide where it fits. It's the only one that specifically says it's spoken in fulfillment of Scripture. The Holy Spirit intensifies the drama by switching from the past to present tense. "Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus *says*, 'I am thirsty.'" We're right there with John, Mother Mary, Mary Magdalen, and others as Jesus says one word: *dipsaō*, I thirst.

He thirsts for physical water. It's possible Jesus hasn't had anything to drink since the Passover meal last night. The soldier's action then was a great kindness. The sour wine mixed with water, wrongly translated vinegar, was a cherished refreshing drink that the soldier was willing to share with Jesus (Kiehl, *Passion*, 137). The Holy Spirit saw that this would be the case and so through the mouth of David said: "My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue sticks to the roof of My mouth" (Ps. 22:15). The One who promised streams of living water flowing forever in those who believe in Him is bone dry. The One who proclaimed Himself the Water of Life is thirsty unto death. Jesus dies of thirst because Moses struck a rock to get water for the OT Church rather than speak to it as commanded. Because David lived for up to a year impenitent of fornication and murder, Jesus' "moisture was turned into the drought of summer" (Ps. 32:4). Jesus thirsts because Peter's faith failed him and he plunged into the sea. Jesus thirsts because 11 other apostles didn't even have the faith to try to walk on it.

I know what you're thinking. "What's thirst compared to hanging nailed to a cross?" "What's thirst compared to bearing the guilt and the shame of all sins and sinners?" We'd die of embarrassment if just ours was seen by all. Jesus had everyone's. There is a 15th century wall painting. It has "blasphemous drunkards and gamblers surround the Virgin, cradling her dead son in her arms, each sin inflicting a fresh wound on the body of Jesus" (MacCulloch, *Reformation*, 6, reeddesign.co.uk/paintedchurch/broughton-swearers.htm). The disgust we have for the sinfulness of others, the turned up noses, the averted eyes, the shaking of the head, Jesus bore this all. The disgust we feel, only now and again, for our own sin and sinfulness. That foul taste. That turning of the stomach. That all is lost feeling. Jesus knew this all, so what's a little thirst, right?

If you really want to know: talk to the elderly, the dying, or the medicated about how being thirsty is no big thing. It torments, and I mean torments them sometimes. They may have had major surgery, they may be actually dying, they may be medicated out of their mind, but thirst rages. Anything for relief. Just a little sponge dipped in water. They will suck it dry. Just one more ice chip. One more sip. What's dying, ailing, or the future, compared to this thirst? And you know nothing about guilt, or an evil conscience if you don't know that spiritual guilt attaches itself to physical suffering, so that the one suffering can't distinguish one from the other. The thirst points to their failures. David is speaking as Christ when he says his moisture was turned into the drought of summer. That's Ps. 32. which David says is about his unconfessed sins of fornicating and murder. He connects these to "his life juices being turned into drought." "I'm thirsty" is as much as saying, "I'm guilty."

I thirst for righteousness. That's what Jesus says in His Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matt. 5:6) That's an ideal for those in Christ, but it's reality for the Christ. Of course, as God the Son, He had all righteousness, but He thirsts to gain mine, yours, ours. First, He had to fulfill all the righteous demands of the Law. You name the Commandment and Jesus did it perfectly. Never did He sin even in thought let alone word or deed. But we do all three all the time. And so Jesus suffered the just punishments against sinners, the worst sinners, especially you. And you know that meant going to hell. And how does Jesus describe hell? A burning fire that can't be put out. Being so thirsty that the Rich Man begs for just a drop of water from the finger of Lazarus. He thirsts indeed.

A favorite verse of liberal Christianity is Amos 5:24, "Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" And they have since the 20s thought in terms of social justice, but political righteousness, economic righteousness, racial righteousness gets no one to heaven. That's really the problem with this woke movement. They regard their political wokeness as religious righteousness; their political position is godly, holy, able to save them for eternity. Wrong, but the opposite political position isn't saving either; it's not religious righteousness. Only perfect righteousness, complete righteousness, being right with God in body and soul saves. And who but Christ had such righteousness, and could release it in a flood-tide? A river full of it? A never-failing stream of it?

Here's an important point. You miss that political, ethical rightness is not righteousness before God, and you miss the Gospel. The conservative side of the 60s I grew up in made this mistake. I thought that Washington standing before his father saying, "I cannot tell a lie" was his salvation. I thought the one nation under God I pledged allegiance to was certainly the true God's favored nation. I thought what was good for America was holiness with God. I was wrong. What avails before God is not civil righteousness or wokeness, not liberal or conservative politics but Divine righteousness. Which only God can deliver. What God the Son thirsts to release for all humanity is His Spirit. This is what Jesus says: "Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this Jesus meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were later to receive" (Jn 7:38-39). Just two verses after Jesus says, "I thirst", John records, "When Jesus therefore had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And He bowed His head, and handed over, the Spirit." The Stream of eternal living water is tapped in part by Jesus' thirsting.

Let's make sure we get the whole picture. Jesus' thirst for us and our salvation. A Good Friday hymn says, "O mighty Prince of Life, Thy thirst/ For us and our salvation/ Is truly great; do help us, then,/ That we escape damnation" (*Our blessed*

Savior Seven Times Spoke, TLH 177:5) Jesus doesn't just thirst to *give* us righteousness. He thirsts for us to *take* it, *receive* it, *believe* it, *depend* on it. Remember how He awakened spiritual thirst in the woman at the well by speaking of physical thirst? That's what He wants to do here. The spiritual things of God that we need are portrayed in terms of physical thirst being suffered and satisfied by Jesus and so winning a never-ending stream of righteousness for us.

Jesus gets to the point of not only dying of thirst but dying. Handing Himself over to the final judgment you deserve. He suffered it innocently, eternally, till God the Father declares, "I'm satisfied. My white hot wrath has been quenched in the innocent blood of My Son." You want to deny that? You want to doubt that? How dare we! God says, "I'm satisfied by the innocent suffering and death of My only beloved Son", and we dare say, "O no you're not." God says, "I have put away your sins for the sake of My Son's holy life and damned death," and you're going to say, "I doubt that." You know all those love songs about the person being in love till the 12th of never, deeper than an ocean, or higher than the mountains? Man in his fallenness, his fickleness can sing such things and they're believable to us. But the holy God can't?

Art can express truths of God's Word powerfully, forcefully at least to this sinner. Look up Otto Dix's 1924 "War Triptych". It's filled with images of WW I, gruesome, brutal images. But at the top of the center panel, there's part of a bridge. Stretched out on that bridge, is a corpse. Follow the outstretched arm, down to a hand, down to a finger. Follow to where that boney finger points, you see a bullet-ridden Jesus buried upside down in a pile of corpses. (*Lessing, Zechariah, 263*). Don't miss Jesus. He's really here in our here and now by Word and Sacrament for the forgiveness of your sins and the giving of His Spirit. And He's in whatever you are in the midst of be it Sin, Death, or Devil. He went through death and hell for you. Whatever you're going through now, He wants you, demands you to be certain He is there with you. He knows what it means to thirst for water, for help, for companionship, for better days, for God. And because He suffered such things as punishment for your sins, you don't, won't, can't.

The Fugger Chapel in Augsburg Germany has a statue over its altar of Jesus being taken down from the cross. You can't tell if Mary and others taking Him down are supporting Him or is the dead Jesus supporting them? That's good theology. We might be doing ourselves a disservice by having Good Friday *and* Easter services. Jesus' death and resurrection form and indivisible unity. "[F]or a long time, there was no separate day for recalling Jesus' death. Redemption was grounded in Jesus' death and resurrection. So the two events were seen as two sides of one coin and were celebrated together during the Easter night" (*Church from Age to Age, 128*). So even today, let the dead Jesus, who is at once the living Jesus, support you, carry you.

Achilles says at the death of Patroclus, "Death can find nothing to expose in him that is not beautiful" (*Homer, Iliad, 22.13*). This is the true of the dead Jesus. David prophesied and Peter and Paul preached it as fulfilled that the dead Jesus didn't decay. This is where the Catholic concept of Odor of Sanctity, a sweet smell coming from the grave of a saint comes from. It's certainly true of Jesus' death. From His dead body came as John tells us: Water and Blood. A 17th century Lutheran applies this: "So also Christ, the second and heavenly Adam, fell asleep into death on the cross; and His side was opened, from which blood and water ran out. Hereby are signified both Sacraments" (*History of the Suffering, Gerhard, 303*). From the death of Christ we smell the sweet Wine of His blood and the sweet water of His Baptism. He thirsts even now for you taste both to quench your thirst for forgiveness, for life, for salvation in a floodtide of His Spirit. Amen

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