

Thirst

Good Friday, April 18, 2025

*Based on John 19:28. Jesus thirsts.*

*I thirst*, Jesus says. And in this Word, we hear our own voice, we who hunger and thirst for righteousness, desperate to be filled.

This is the thirst of the single mom desperate to feed her sick baby. This is the thirst of the father who works three jobs just trying to pay the bills. This is the thirst of the alcoholic who is drowning in thirst, begging a power greater than themselves to quench the parched places in their spirit. This is the thirst of the sin-sick soul desperate for redemption.

I did not truly know the spiritual enfleshment of thirst until I lived in the desert, serving my first congregation in Tucson, Arizona fifteen years ago. The sun does not simply shine in that desert; it burns. The ground cracks. Joints ache, just from being. Eyelids split open from the heat and the dry. Thirst, I learned there is *a dry and weary land where there is no water*.

It is also a land of death.

Along the southern border, migrants fleeing persecution in their own lands find themselves forced into the driest, most dangerous parts of the desert, seeking shelter in this one. In response to their thirst, churches and synagogues and mosques and non-religious people of good will have joined together to place water tanks along the migrant trails. Tanks filled with water as prayer, as sacrament, as silent cry for mercy in a dry and weary land where thirst can actually kill.

More than once, when I dwelled in that land, we would return to find those tanks riddled with bullet holes and the water drained out by local militia groups. Not to serve and protect but to randomly and gleefully terrorize. I call that evil. More than once, when I dwelled in that land, we found bodies nearby. Teenagers. Adults. Children as young as three. Children that would have been saved if only the water had remained in the tank! Children who died with dry tongues and empty hands, within sight of a mercy that had been stripped from their reach! Children who died with one word on their lips: *I thirst!*

The cry of Jesus in his thirst from the cross reverberates through the flesh of the desert Southwest, as it reverberates through the heart-parched desert of our soul. Living Water Made Flesh is a body in need, without pretense or power. Living Water Made Flesh is parched on the cross in a cry of solidarity with every parched and forsaken soul in creation.

God. Is. Thirsty!

And then ... at least for me ... a miracle.

A momentary raindrop. Right on the crown of the head. Can it be? It is! And another! And a third! Yes it is true! There IS water in the wilderness! A Holy Trinity of justice-love, not yet gushing, not yet *flowing like an everlasting stream*, not even yet *springing up from the water of life*, but just faintly dripping, just a double or triple dose of *Ho, all who thirst, come now to the water*, just a momentary promise that sour wine on a stick is not the final answer but that a *river of the water of life SURGING from the very throne of God and from the Lamb IS!* With lush vibrant resurrected trees blossoming on either side of the abundant river. *And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.*

We are not there yet. Lord knows we are not there yet. It is Friday, after all.

*But Sunday's coming!!!*

A draught of cool, clear, CLEAN water is coming! A river on the mountaintop for the poor and needy is coming! A restored soul beside still waters is coming! A wilderness desert turned pool of water is coming! A garden of joy and gladness, thanksgiving and the voice of song is coming!

In the meantime, as we wait for Sunday to come in its fullness, WE are the ones who pour out what we can. WE are the ones who refuse to let love run dry. WE are the ones who insist that if Jesus thirst still, we will not rest. WE will place the water jugs. WE will defend the wellsprings. WE will cry out with the thirst and walk with the parched. *WE shall be like a garden; like a deep spring whose waters never fail.*

And when we have nothing left, when our waters do start to fail, we are the ones who will trust, even there, that God is still moving toward us in our own thirst, with justice and mercy and grace flowing from infinitely cupped hands.