

When I was sixteen, my parents took me and my younger sister, Katie, and on vacation to Emerald Isle in North Carolina. It was beautiful. One afternoon after spending a lot of time on the beach I decided to go for a run. It was about three in the afternoon on a very hot and humid day. The run started off fine. I was enjoying looking at all the beautiful scenery. When 30 minutes had passed, I realized that I was lost and didn't know my way back to the beach house. What started off as a leisurely run quickly turned into a dangerous situation and an hour and a half run.

I had not brought any water with me since I had not planned to be gone very long. This was the first time in my life I felt my body was crying out for water. I was becoming dehydrated quickly. It was over 95 degrees, very humid, and very sunny. I started to panic not knowing what to do. I kept turning around and around trying to remember where the house was. My hands started to swell. Sweat was pouring off me.

Finally, I saw my sister Katie running towards me. She had come looking for me and led me back to the house. Thank God she found me. I came home and drank a lot of water and soon felt much better.

This memory has always stuck in my mind, the feeling of knowing what it is like to be extremely thirsty.

We are all thirsty. We are created with a thirst and longing for the living God. We hear this desire in Psalm 42:1-2: “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”

Water has played such an important part in the life of our faith. Throughout Scripture we see that God has provided life for God's people through water. God saved the Israelites by parting the Red Sea and giving the people water from a rock while they were on their journey in the wilderness.

In the New Testament, Jesus explains that he is continuing this same saving grace of God. When he meets the Samaritan woman, he asks her for something to drink and then tells her that he can give her living water. Jesus says, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life” (John 4:13-14).

What is beautiful about Jesus asking for a drink from the cross is that this moment shows the humanity of Jesus.

Adam Hamilton explains in his book *Final Words from the Cross* “Jesus was fully human” and fully divine. “Before his death, he thirsted as we thirst, and then he died as we die.”<sup>i</sup> This is important because it shows that we serve a God who knows our humanity, a God who knows our suffering.

When we grieve God grieves with us because God knows what is like to suffer and what it is like to watch a loved one die. There is so much deeper meaning to Jesus’ words “I thirst.” Last week we talked about Jesus’s words “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” which were a mirror reflection of psalm 22. This week is no different. Psalm 69:21b shares “For my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.”<sup>ii</sup> Jesus once again fulfills the scripture to show that he is the promised Messiah.

There is also something interesting that happens in the action of giving Jesus something to drink. The gospel of John shares that the vessel that took the sour wine to Jesus’ lips was a hyssop branch. In the Gospel of Matthew and Mark people offer Jesus the sour wine on a stick. So, what is with the hyssop branch in the Gospel of John and why does it matter?

It turns out the hyssop branch has many important meanings. First, Hamilton shares that the hyssop branch is a reminder of God’s continual covenant with the people of God. He says, “On the last night of their slavery, God sent a terrible plague upon the Egyptians, one final act to force Pharaoh to release his people from bondage...In preparation for this terrible plague where the firstborn would be killed, God gave Moses special instructions to save God’s people.”<sup>iii</sup>

Before cooking and eating the lamb, they were to take the blood of the lamb, and using a branch of hyssop, sprinkle it over the doorpost. When the angel of death came...it would pass over the homes of the Israelites preserving their lives. This is how Passover got its name, when God passed over the Israelites, preserving their lives and aiding them in their escape to freedom from slavery.

This is not the only reason the hyssop branch was important. Remember on Ash Wednesday I talked about ashes being mixed with water to allow people to be purified? The hyssop branch was dipped in the ashes and water used as the agent to sprinkle the person who needed to be purified (Leviticus 14:4-6, 49).<sup>iv</sup>

King David in his psalm of repentance that we read on Ash Wednesday says, “Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow” (Psalm 51:7).

Hyssop was a purifying agent. Jesus Christ’s death on the cross became the ultimate purifying agent because through this action we are purified of our sins and washed clean. Also, Hamilton shares that Moses used the hyssop branch to sprinkle over the law and the people saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained for you” (Hebrews 9:19-20).<sup>v</sup>

The Gospel of John, being the gospel of signs, shows the important symbolism of the hyssop branch. Just as God preserved the lives of the Israelites during Passover through using the blood of a lamb and a hyssop branch, Jesus has now become the sacrificial lamb who John calls the “lamb of God.”

In John 1:29, John the Baptist says, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” Jesus is the sacrificial lamb who continues the covenant God made with the people of Israel. Wow what a wonderful God that we serve.

It is amazing when we spend time in study all the things we can learn about Scripture. We tend to learn that there is much deeper meaning than what meets the eye. It is important for us to see all the ways in which Jesus is fulfilling the scripture through his sayings on the cross.

So often in Scripture the people that Jesus was talking to could not understand what he meant. It seems he was really trying to explain to the people who he was and what he had been called to do, but it is only in retrospect that we can even begin to see all the connections.

Another important meaning for Jesus two simple words “I thirst” has to do with communion. In response to James and John asking to sit at his right- and left-hand Jesus said, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?”<sup>vi</sup> Jesus knew that he was the only one who could change our sin problem. He had to suffer and die so that we could have life. He tried to tell the disciples, this was not the end of the story.

Jesus spent some special time with the disciple during Passover where he gave the ordinary elements, bread and wine, extraordinary meaning. That evening after dinner he took the cup and said, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20).

Jesus was showing that a new covenant would be started through his death and resurrection. He knew what he needed to do, but no one wants to suffer, he even said to God, ““Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42).

And yet, Jesus fulfilled the will of God by drinking of the cup of death and suffering so he could give us life. This is why communion is especially significant to us as Christians. On the first Sunday of the month we get to retell the story of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. We remember the same movement and motions of Jesus as he shared the bread and cup, and we give thanks that Christ suffered for us so that we could have everlasting life.

We take spiritual nourishment from this holy mystery, but this is not the end of our story. Like Christ, how are we extending God’s grace to others? How are we helping to quench the thirst of those who are hungry in body or spirit?

We are called to help others find the living water that God is offering to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The good news for our lives today is that God is offering us this living water through our faith in Jesus Christ. When we receive this gift, we are called to pour out our lives for God. We are called to live lives of sacrifice, just as Christ did for us.

This season of Lent, we gave things up to physically embody our thankfulness for Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. What are the things we can continue to give up beyond the season of Lent, so we can continue to pour out our lives for God?

May we continue to long for the living God who quenches our thirst with grace. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Adam Hamilton. “Final Words from the Cross.” Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN, 2011. P. 91.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid, p. 90.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid, p. 98.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid, p. 99.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vi</sup> Matthew 20:22.