

Evanston Pastor's Fellowship  
Holy Week Service  
John 19:28-30

## Good Friday I'm Thirsty

*After this, when Jesus knew that everything was now accomplished that the Scripture might be fulfilled, He said, "I'm thirsty!" 29 A jar full of sour wine was sitting there; so they fixed a sponge full of sour wine on hyssop and held it up to His mouth. 30 When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" Then bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.*

A raging fire burned in the throat of the son of Mary.

That he could speak at all is amazing, that from the fiery depths of his bleeding and cracked throat he could manage to, in even a raspy voice say anything at all is difficult to comprehend. Today we read from John 19, that Jesus cried out "I'm thirsty." No, he didn't cry it out. He ground it out. "I thirst."

Thirst is a basic human instinct. Our human bodies are made of 70% water. When the water level of our bodies falls below a certain level, it is the natural human reaction to grow thirsty. An imbalance of osmolytes such as salt and the loss of bodily fluids can cause the level of liquid in cells to diminish. As dehydration sets in, the skin becomes dry, the mouth parched, skin cracks.

Simply being in the heat of the sun without a drink can cause one to grow thirsty. I am from Nevada, and it is not uncommon to find the skeletal remains of animals in the desert, animals that had died for lack of water, died of thirst. On many of the long hikes I've had my family take through the desert, we will walk the last two or three miles without water, and at the end of such a hike any liquid is good, it doesn't have to be cold, it doesn't have to be clean, it just has to be just a little, o Lord, just a little wet.

I've never hiked through the desert with a cross on back, as Jesus stumbled from exhaustion through the *Via Dolorosa*, the way of grief. I am certain that even then Jesus was thirsty. I've never had a crown of thorns thrust upon my head, and the loss of the blood. I've never had spike driven through my hands and my feet, with my remaining blood being driven from my body with each contraction of my aching heart. I say remaining blood in my body, for even though my momma would whoop me with belt on the days I needed it the most, I have never received a whooping like Jesus. The Roman scourge or whip, with its claw like hooks ripping chunks of Jesus back and sides and legs and arms with each of the 39 lashes he received before this grueling trek to Golgotha.

The loss of blood was staggering. The loss of bodily fluids was immense, catastrophic. The symptoms of extreme dehydration include massive migraine-like headaches, visual snow - a clouding of the visual field, lack of tears or sweat, sometimes fainting, and if it goes on too long, delirium, unconsciousness and death.

I've been thirsty. You've been thirsty. Unless you were a prisoner of war, or lost in a desert wilderness, unless you've been shot and bled to within an inch of your life, you have never been as thirsty as Jesus was.

He said from the cross, "I'm thirsty." The sixth word of his seven last.

How human. How like the dying son of Mary. How tragic.

The scripture says a jar of sour wine was sitting nearby so they fixed a sponge full of sour wine on hyssop and held it up to his mouth. "They" – those that held the sponge up to Jesus – were the Romans soldiers on duty, perhaps some who had even gambled for his garments just a few hours earlier. Matthew, Mark and Luke also refer to the wine that was lifted to Jesus. It seems to me an act of compassion. The sour wine was not actually sour, as in milk that has gone sour or bad. Think of it more like sour cherries, a kind of cherry. The sour wine was a kind of wine. It was actually a mixture of water, vinegar, and eggs that was a common drink of the common Roman soldier, an old school version of Gatorade. It was called *posca*.

Placed upon a natural sponge, and stuck on the end of a stalk of hyssop, this was lifted up to Jesus. The kind of hyssop growing in the area had a rough stalk about 18-20 inches long. Easily long enough to place the liquid upon the lips of the dying crucified. Did the soldiers respond out of compassion for Jesus? Maybe, he cried out, "I'm thirsty." I wonder if his mother, or perhaps the beloved disciple, who stay near the foot of the cross pled on his behalf. "Dear sirs, please can't you see his suffering?" Regardless, here in the Gospel of John it says, 'when he had received the wine...' In Mark, Luke and Matthew, Jesus refuses the wine and does not drink of it. Here in John it does not affirm that he drank, he may well have received it without drinking. I don't think he did drink.

But that really doesn't matter, because frankly, I don't think his thirst was a physical thirst. Or rather, his thirst was not *merely* a physical thirst. Oh he was physically thirsty. He had lost by this point nearly ever fluid in his human body. By now blood no longer flowed from this crown of thorns, blood no longer flowed from wrists and feet. By now saliva no longer formed in his mouth. By now, tears no longer formed in his eyes, though no doubt Mary wept bitterly at his feet. By now indeed his throat would have been a raging fire, and his body may have already begun to jerk in the seizures of the dehydrated.

But far more than a mere desire for water, this is his prayer to his father in heaven. A prayer that his life and ministry would not be in vain. For what had Jesus been thirsting and hungering throughout his life?

Jesus said, *Matthew 5:6* "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." He has thirsted to do the will of God. He has thirsted for righteousness. When with the woman at the well, she was seeking water, plain H<sub>2</sub>O, but Jesus offered something far superior,

*John 4:13* "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,<sup>14</sup> but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Christ himself is the living water, anyone who would drink of this living water never thirsts. When his disciples arrived as he spoke to her, and offered him some lunch, he just walked away and said I have food you know nothing about. His disciples figured someone else brought him food, but bread and wine were not the first thing on Jesus' mind. It was establishing the Kingdom of God. Jesus thirst was for the fullness of God to be poured out into the broken people for whom he was at that moment being crucified.

Jesus was accomplishing his task, the purpose for his coming, the purpose for his miraculous birth, signs and wonders, all was being fulfilled according to scripture, even his thirst. All the prophecies had been fulfilled. Even declaring his thirst fulfilled prophecy.

Psalm 69 was fulfilled.

*Psalm 69:21 They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.*

But listen to the outcome of this Psalm, it was not just sour wine would be served a suffering man, but that God's salvation would be achieved.

Listen to verses 29-33:

*"I am in pain and distress; may your salvation, O God, protect me. I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving... The poor will see and be glad— you who seek God, may your hearts live! The LORD hears the needy and does not despise his captive people!"*

The suffering of the Messiah, the thirst of Son of God, would involve physical pain and death, but the deeper thirst would be quenched. The poor will see and be glad! Those who seek God will live! The needy and the captive, the oppressed and neglected, the hungry and naked, the homeless and enslaved, the raped and beaten, the forgotten and abused, will see and be glad! Their thirst for justice is god's thirst for justice! Their hunger for righteousness, a world in which children do not fear being abandoned by parents, a world in which opportunity is not limited by the color of your skin, a world in which being a woman doesn't mean being a second-class citizen, a world in which the reign of Christ increasingly grows day by day. Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

This is the thirst of Jesus.

The book of Hebrews tells us (12:2) *"Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."* What motivated Jesus to endure the cross, the nail pierced hands, the beard ripped from his face, abandonment by his own disciples, the 39 lashes, the mocking scorn, being stripped naked and lifted in humiliation before jeering soldiers who gambled for his clothing in front of his mother? He endured the cross, says the Scripture, for the joy set before him.

*O Lord. We won't endure an hour on Sunday to sing his praise in an air-conditioned sanctuary with padded seats.*

*We won't endure the thought of giving to the church Jesus founded and through which the hungry are fed and homeless housed and the widow loved and the word declared.*

*We won't endure any cross word given us without biting right back.*

*We won't endure any minute without our fix of whatever we think we need.  
O Lord. We won't endure any mistakes our children make before whacking them  
upside the head, or any mistakes our husband or wives make before berating them  
for 'always' doing that.*

Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before him, for the certain hope that his thirst would be quenched. Not by sour wine on a sponge, that quenches nothing. Jesus knows that within his soul, the very soul of God flows living water just waiting to burst upon the parched wilderness of the earth. Jesus knows that within his soul, the very soul of God flows a spring that has no end just waiting to pour life into the hearts of women and men who would turn from the things that do not satisfy and turn to the one who can.

Just as Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before him, so Jesus thirsts for the righteousness and love and joy and hope that came to give to you, and to me.

*I know what I thirsted for before I met Jesus. I know what my inner most being raged for.  
I know what I hungered for.  
I thirst for alcohol! I needed one more drink.  
I thirst for recognition! I needed to be affirmed by others.  
I thirst for sexual fulfillment. I needed to feel good, oh so good.  
I thirst for money! I needed to have more.  
I thirst for comfort! When I felt hurt I thirsted for others to minister to me! Not that I  
thirsted to comfort others.  
I thirst for entertainment! In this lifeless world what else is there, but to find something  
somewhere to make us laugh, something somewhere to make us dance, something  
somewhere to get our minds off of how empty we really are, and how thirsty for  
something we can't put our finger on that we really are.  
I thirst for bling, bling. If you can't be good, you might as well look good!  
I thirst for power. I needed to be in control, and would hurt people who would threaten  
this.  
God help me, sometimes I still thirst for these things. But they do not satisfy! Only the  
living water of God's Holy Spirit, of Christ within, satisfies and fulfills.  
What does your inner most being thirst for? What wakes you up each day?  
Sometimes I wake up and the first thing I need to do is walk to the sink and grab a drink  
of water. But aside from that basic physical thirst, what do we hunger for? What are we  
thirsty for? What are we living for? Recognition? Money? Sex? Comfort? Ease?  
Entertainment?*

Jesus thirsted. He longed for the kingdom of God. May it come to earth, as it is heaven. He knew the agony of the cross was the critical step to removing the barrier between God in heaven and a sinful, self-seeking, violent, lustful, spiteful, arrogant, broken, crushed, oppressed, hopeless people. Even on the cross, even thirsty beyond description, Jesus remains the "Living Water" and all who drink of him will never get thirsty. Jesus thirsted for . . .

*Thirst for justice.  
Thirst for healing.*

*Thirst for liberation.*  
*Thirst for salvation.*  
*Thirst for people who will love.*  
*Thirst for people who will tell the truth.*  
*Thirst for a people who would be the regalness of the color of their skin.*  
*Thirst for a world where old men and women can walk to a move at night and not be afraid.*  
*Thirst for a church that cares more about stain on our hearts than the stain on our carpets.*  
*Thirst for a people who live to serve.*  
*Thirst for men who stay with their wives and children.*  
*Thirst for women who love their husbands.*  
*Thirst for pastors who will shepherd their flock and not as a mere hireling.*  
*Thirst for the kingdom of God.*

Think about the seven last words. I thirst is number six in the count down. What was Jesus doing on the cross? If we are crucified with Christ, which the Bible says we are when place our faith in Jesus, if we are crucified with Christ, then ought not our lives reflect even that Jesus on the cross.

While spikes were driven through his body, while his enemies spat upon him, he cried out, "Father forgive them!" O God. Can we so forgive? Can we be so thirsty for a world characterized by peace and love and hope that we, like Christ, are willing to let the hatred and bitterness stop with us, to absorb the anger and rage of the world and speak back to those who hate, "I forgive you."

Jesus thirsts for a people who forgive. That first word.

Between two thieves Jesus was crucified. And as one mocked him, the other simply asked that Christ remember him. While yet bleeding, and still amidst the shouts of the thief who spat poison at the son of god, Jesus promised that this penitent thief would die on cross with Jesus, but wake up in paradise. Even on the cross Jesus bore witness to his eternal purposes and took time to look away from his own pain and to invite yet one more into the kingdom.

Jesus thirsts for a people who will bear witness to his gift of eternal life, even when others may laugh and ridicule, even amidst pain. Jesus thirsts for evangelists, for witnesses, who will risk scorn to tell others the good news. The second word.

From the cross Jesus looked upon the only two who stood by his side – his mother and the beloved disciple, probably John who wrote this text. I am certain their hearts were breaking, Mary for her son and John for his mentor and friend. Yet, Jesus took pains despite his own pain to comfort his mother, to give purpose to John, to pair them in a mutual community of love. Mother, behold your son, son, behold your mother. Even at his death, Jesus looked after his family and friends.

Jesus thirsts for a people who will love their husbands, love their wives, love their children, no matter what the cost. The third word.

The world forgiven, the penitent sinner welcomed to paradise, the family cared for, the time came for the dark night of the soul. The time came when even the Son of God, for your sake and mine, felt for the first time the withdrawal of the presence of the father.

Perhaps it was at this point that, as Saint Peter writes, our sins were placed upon him as he was on that tree. Physical pain and death, while gruesome and horrible, were not what led to words of utter despair that Jesus offers up now, "My god, my god, why have you forsaken me." It was a spiritual darkness he felt for the first time in his eternal life. Jesus of Nazareth willingly withdrew from the presence of the father and willingly offered himself a sacrifice for your sin and mine.

St. Peter writes that he bore our sins in his body upon that tree! He tasted all the bitter poison of our lies, our infidelity, our fear, our doubt, our hatred, our lust, our rage – the one clean thing on earth became sin for us. Jesus becomes the scapegoat for humanity. Why? Because he thirsts for the day when you and I are set free from the bondage to sin, from the bondage to addictions, from the bondage to hatred, from the bondage to economic powers that main people into poverty while blinding others with wealth. He thirsts for a day when those of us who feel that God has forsaken us would one day see through resurrection eyes otherwise. The fourth word.

After the sour wine had been lifted to Jesus lips, after declaring his thirst, the fifth word, according to the gospel, is "It is finished." His raging thirst continues, but it is about to be quenched. For the joy set before him he had endured to this moment. The joy of a people dripping with the living water of the Holy Spirit, the joy of a world where glimmers of light would shine from individuals and communities that swim in the living water, and begin to bring life to a dying world, hope to a despairing world.

There was an ancient Greek tale of another son of the gods, Tantalus, son of Zeus. This Son of a God did evil, and was punished for eternity by being bound neck deep in a pool of water, underneath a fruit tree with low branches. For eternity, whenever he would reach for fruit, the branches would raise just beyond his reach. For eternity, whenever he would thirst, and seek to stoop his neck to sip from the pool of water in which he was immersed, the water would recede just beyond his reach. From the myth of *Tantalus* we get the word tantalize.

Jesus did no evil, being the only man never to sin, though he became sin for you and me. But as a result, and unlike Tantalus, when the mission of Jesus Christ was finished, his thirst would indeed be quenched, and not his alone, but your thirst for righteousness as well. The sixth word.

When at last the time came, his final whisper from a bleeding throat and cracked lips, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." Jesus' thirst at last is quenched. The seventh word.

But the story is not finished. And while Jesus throat ceases to burn, and his wounds cease to bleed, the Son of God still thirsts and hungers for the kingdom of god on earth as it in heaven. Jesus still burns for a people that would be faithful and full of the Holy Spirit.

*Ezra in the book of Nehemiah tells Israel (9:15):*

*"In their hunger you gave them bread from heaven and in their thirst you brought them water from the rock; you told them to go in and take possession of the land you had sworn with uplifted hand to give them."*

In our hunger God gave us Jesus Christ, Bread from Heaven. Will you eat of Jesus? In our thirst, God brought us Living Water from the rock of Jesus Christ. Will you drink?

In the power of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, are we not also called to take possession of the land, to allow a flood of God's healing and peace, God's order and prosperity, God's hope and love to flow from our hearts into our churches, and from our churches into our streets? Through Jesus Christ, the rock upon which stand, the rock that was struck on Good Friday, the rock from which pours a living water that quenches us, and refreshes us, and fills us and I pray flows from us into every one we encounter.

Brother, sister, friend.

For what are you thirsty today?

From what sources are you drinking to quench that thirst?

Are you looking to Tantalus to fulfill your thirst?

Or to the source of living water? Jesus Christ.

If it is not from the rock that was struck to bring you living water, then you will continue to burn and rage with a fever for more and never be satisfied, like Tantalus sitting in a pool of water for all eternity.

Jesus thirst today is for you to be thirsty for Jesus.

When we drink of Christ, we make the dark cruelty of that Friday on Golgotha 2000 years ago a 'Good' Friday. When we drink of Christ, his spirit pours into our lives and begins to refresh and renew our spirit, and makes you one of his good children. When we drink of Christ, his Spirit pours from our lives and churches begin to seep into and even flood the world with a faith and hope and love that changes everything.

Jesus on the cross cried out, "I thirst."

The resurrected Jesus, at the end of the Scripture, speaks again to John and tells us...

*Revelation 22:13, 17 "I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. . . The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life."*