

Come and See 2025

Week 4: The Water of Life

A single drop of water contains so much life. Without water all life on earth will die.

The Book of Ezekiel contains a remarkable vision of the power of living water. Towards the end of the book, for seven long chapters, Ezekiel describes in great detail the construction of a new temple. It's an extraordinary vision of hope but these are not the most exciting chapters in the Bible. There is an awful lot of measuring and cubits and regulations about offerings. The temple is beautiful and perfectly proportioned in the midst of the desert, but at the end of six chapters there is still no life.

But then in Chapter 47, Ezekiel's guide leads him back to the entrance of the temple. There Ezekiel sees a tiny stream of water flowing from below the threshold. Perhaps little more than a teardrop flowing from the altar, the place of prayer and sacrifice.

Ezekiel and his guide follow this tiny stream out into the desert. They measure a thousand cubits. The water is now ankle deep. They measure another thousand cubits. The water is knee deep. They measure another thousand cubits. It's up to the waist.

Again he measured another one thousand and it was a river that I could not cross, for the water had risen; it was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be crossed. He said to me, Mortal have you seen this? (Ezekiel 47.5-6).

The river flowing from the temple grows deeper and wider but that is not the point of the story. Now Ezekiel sees the immense power of this water to give life.

Then he led me back along the bank of the river. As I came back, I saw on the bank of the river a great many trees on one side and on the other (47.7).

The water touches the desert and life blooms again. But there is still more. This river of life flows down to the inland sea known the world over as the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is the one place on the whole surface of the earth or in the oceans where nothing lives at all. But this tiny stream flowing from the middle of the temple has the power to bring life even here:

Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live.... everything will live where the river goes. (47.9).

On the banks on both sides of the river there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing (47.12).

In the waters of baptism, women and men made of dust, fashioned from the ground, come to be washed and to be made new. We come to the waters, our old life dies, and we rise again to new and eternal life with God.

But we have still only just begun to explore the meaning of our baptism. For God promises that everyone who is baptised into Christ will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist promises whilst he baptises in water alone, after him will come one who baptises (or drenches or immerses or fills) people with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3.11; Mark 1.8; Luke 3.16 and John 1.33).

On the Day of Pentecost Peter clearly links repentance and baptism with the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is the normal Christian life:

Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2.38).

In our own baptism service, this is one of the prayers used after each candidate has been baptised:

May God who has received you by baptism into his Church pour upon you the riches of his grace, that within the company of Christ's pilgrim people you may daily be renewed by his anointing Spirit.

Those who are baptised as adults are normally confirmed straight away. Those baptised as children will come, we pray, to confirmation. In the confirmation service the bishop prays for all of the candidates together:

Let your Holy Spirit rest upon them: the Spirit of wisdom and understanding; the Spirit of counsel and inward strength; the Spirit of knowledge and true godliness.

The bishop then lays hands on each candidate and prays for them by name, echoing the words at Jesus own baptism:

Steven or Jane or David or Mary, God has called you by name and made you his own

Confirm O Lord your servant with your Holy Spirit.

Then we pray together as a whole congregation for God's grace and protection:

Defend, O Lord, these your servants with your heavenly grace that they may continue yours for ever, and daily increase in your Holy Spirit more and more until they come to your everlasting kingdom.

In the second half of Come and See we are going to explore this remarkable gift of the Holy Spirit given in our baptism and again in confirmation through the three images the Bible gives to us: water, wind and fire. Again these images take us deeper into what it means to be human. We see the immense dignity and potential of our calling as children of God, filled with God's Spirit and called to join in with God's mission in the world.

So let's return to that picture of Ezekiel and the river of life flowing from the place of prayer and out into the desert. How does Jesus build on that picture of transformation?

In John 4, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman in the heat of the day next to a well. Jesus asks her for a drink of water. His request crosses boundaries of race and

gender and reputation. A tender, playful dialogue follows. Jesus speaks of living water:

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 4.14)

Jesus echoes Ezekiel here in this language of the water of life: everything will live where the river goes.

In John 7 the gospel returns to the same theme and the same image:

Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believers' heart shall flow rivers of living water". Now he said this about the Spirit which believers in him were to receive (John 1.37-38).

This is an extraordinary promise. Living water flows from Jesus to the believers. This is an image of Jesus giving us the gift of the Spirit. John tells us that when Jesus was crucified, water and blood flow together from the side of Christ when he is pierced (John 19.34).

But the promise is even greater here. The living water will flow out not just from Jesus but then from every believer. We are the new temple in the desert. The gift of the Spirit overflows for the renewal of the world. Everything will live where the river goes.

Jesus' gift of the Spirit is more than a drink of cold water on a hot day which restores us. Jesus' gift of the Spirit is to place in our hearts a well, a spring of living water bubbling up to eternal life not only for ourselves but for others. This living water flows into the deserts of our hearts: the dryness of our souls; our thirst for meaning and purpose; our wounds that cry out for healing; the memories which need reframing; the bitter roots we hold inside us; the pain and disappointment which weigh us down.

Then over the whole course of our lives this spring of living water bubbles and bubbles and bubbles. Where this life-giving stream flows, everything will live. Our prayer and worship find new life. The seed of the gospel and God's word begin to grow. We have a deeper assurance of God's love. We hear God's voice and call. Our hurts and wounds begin to find healing. We can let go and to forgive. All of this within the love and fellowship of the Christian community who help us grow.

And in time, like a well-watered garden, our lives bear what Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit:

...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5.22-23)

To live as a Christian is to be changed from within, to work with the Spirit in this gentle process of inner transformation which lasts for the whole of our lives.

But then as Christians each of us is also called to be a channel of God's love and gentleness and peace to others. This same living water of the Spirit bubbles up and bubbles over and flows into families, workplaces, schools, churches and neighbourhoods to bring new life. Relationships are mended. Hope and joy grow

again. The weary find comfort. Fear and suspicion are overcome. Everything will live where the river flows.

This is the gift of the Spirit Jesus gives to us. As a Church we are like a desert at the present time. We are parched and thirsty and in deep need of renewal.

So pray with me in this coming week, in the prayer of the Samaritan woman: Lord give me this water so that I may never be thirsty.

The people of earth come to be washed; to offer our lives and rise again from the waters of baptism, to receive a spring of living water.

But we have only explored one of these pictures of the Spirit's life. Next time we will see what it means to be filled with the breath of life.

Come and see.