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Sermon: April 10, 2011  
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“I AM THIRSTY”**  
John 19:28-29

□ John 19:28-29: **“Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, ‘I am thirsty.’ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips.”**

◆ The Scripture to which John refers is the prophecy of Psalm 69:21: **“They... gave me vinegar for my thirst.”** By saying, **“I am thirsty,”** Jesus prompted the soldiers to take an action that would fulfill what was foretold. It is a sign that he is the Messiah.

◆ He also cried out because he was actually thirsty for drinkable water.

Our bodies are roughly 65% water and they use it for many vital functions. During his incarnation, Christ’s mortal body was no different from ours in this.

You know how it is. Even a mild thirst can parch your throat, make your tongue stick to the roof and the sides of your mouth, dry your eyes, and make you more sensitive to heat. A fluid deficit of just 1-2% is enough to make us feel thirsty – while a loss of 12% is often fatal.

The Lord’s deficit was well past 2% when he said, **“I am thirsty.”** In all likelihood, it had already dipped below the crucial 12% mark.

✠ It began Thursday night. **Jesus** was {Lk 22:44} **“in [such] anguish”** and **“prayed [so] earnestly”** in

Gethsemane that **“his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.”** Hematohidrosis is rare, but it has been documented. {F. Zugibe} In reaction to extreme stress, the networks of vessels surrounding the sweat glands can tightly constrict. Later, when the anxiety lifts, **“the blood vessels dilate to the point of rupture”** and **“The blood goes into the sweat glands,”** where it mixes with the sweat.

✠ Next, Roman soldiers flogged Jesus. Their whips consisted of braided leather thongs with metal balls and shards of bone woven into them. The metal left deep bruises, and the bone inflicted severe gashes. The Lord’s flesh was shredded to the consistency of raw hamburger.

✠ Then Jesus carried his cross. It had two pieces: a vertical stake (the *stipe*) and a horizontal crossbeam (the *patibulum*). Jesus did not shoulder an assembled cross. They typically weighed more than 300 pounds, and no one who had just survived a Roman flogging was capable of bearing such a load.

Rather, the stake was carted out to Golgatha in advance. Jesus did carry the crossbeam part of the way and that was exhausting enough. The *patibulum* itself weighed between 75 and 125 lbs. If his body had the fluid to spare, he sweated it out on the way to Golgatha.

✠ Finally, Jesus was crucified. The impaling of his wrists and ankles caused some bleeding, but not as much as we might assume. However, in order to exhale he had to push up with his legs and pull up with his arms. As he did, the torn flesh of the Lord’s flayed

back scraped against the cross – and the wood was painted with his blood.

**“I am thirsty.”** He Lord said it to fulfill prophecy. He said it because he was physically desiccated. He also said it because his spirit was as dry as his body.

■ This is the fifth word from the cross. What was the fourth? {Mk 15:34 TNIV, CEV, Msg, NCV} **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” “Why have you deserted me?” “Why have you abandoned me?” “Why have you left me alone?”** He who was {Php 2:6} **“in very nature God,”** who {Jn 1:1} **“was with God, and [who] was God,”** who said, {Jn 10:30} **“I and the Father are one”** was divided from his Father. No wonder he felt abandoned!

◆ Our salvation could not be secured unless the Father and the Son were cut off from one another. Consequently, God’s presence with Jesus evaporated like dew in Death Valley. So he also said **“I am thirsty”** because his soul was parched.

→ His words sound a lot like Psalm 63:1: **“You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you. I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water.”** They also echo Psalm 42 {42:1-2}: **“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?”**

The irony is jarring, is it not?

★ Jesus is the one who accomplishes God’s generous invitation, {Is 55:1-2a} **“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend your money on**

**what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?”**

The Messiah is God’s ultimate provision for our spiritual fulfillment. Yet on the cross he laments, **“I am thirsty,”** thirsty for satisfaction!

★ Jesus declared, {Jn 6:35, 53-55} **“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.... Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.”**

The Messiah was sent by the Father {Jn 10:10} **“that [we] may have life, and have it to the full.”** Yet on the cross he laments, **“I am thirsty,”** thirsty for life!

★ To the woman at the well in Sychar Jesus claimed, in no uncertain terms: {Jn 4:14} **“Those who drink the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”** Later, he announced to the crowds, {Jn 7:37-39} **“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.’ By this he meant the Spirit.”**

The Messiah came so we might be united to his Father through the Holy Spirit. Yet on the cross he laments, **“I am thirsty,”** thirsty for the presence of God!

**“I am thirsty.”**

What is the Gospel in this word? *How is this Good News for us?*

☛ 1<sup>st</sup>, Jesus sought satisfaction in the LORD above all else, at all costs.

We are born thirsty. There is within each of us a deep thirst that cries out to be satisfied. Only God can answer that cry. Only he can satiate our need.

☑ But dehydrated people get confused. They easily fall prey for mirages that promise water but deliver dust, or even poison. I am reminded of the song *Cool Water*, as sung by Joni Mitchell:

**All day I face the barren waste  
Without a taste of water, cool water  
Old Dan and I our throats slate dry  
Our spirits cry out for water  
Cool clear water**

**Keep on movin' Dan  
Some devils had a plan  
Buried poison in the sand  
Don't drink it man, it's in the water  
Cool clear water....**

**The nights are cool and I'm a fool  
Each star is a pool of water, cool water  
But come the dawn we carry on  
We won't last long without water  
Cool clear water**

**Keep on movin' Dan  
We're still in no-man's land**

**Dry bones and sand  
People never planned here for water  
Cool clear water....**

**The shadows sway, they seem to say  
Tonight we pray for water, cool water  
And way up there, if you care  
Please show us where there's good water  
Cool clear water**

**“Some devils had a plan / buried poison in the sand / don't drink it man / it's in the water.”**  
Every effort to quench our thirst with something other than God will fail. It might work briefly, to a small degree, but in the end it will kill us. Greed, materialism, selfish ambition, pride, sexual sin and addictions are all, as someone has said, {unknown} **“the craving of salt by one who is dying of thirst.”**

☆ Jesus was tempted in every way we are, but he did not settle for salt: he held out for real water, even on the cross. **“I am thirsty”** expresses both his agonizing need and his unflinching commitment to seek his Father. And it does not stop with him: Christ enables all who drink of him to seek the LORD God above all else.

☛ 2<sup>nd</sup>, because Jesus was thirsty, we do not have to endure spiritual emptiness.

Wouldn't it be tragic if God had created us with that inner vacuum only his presence can fill – but then, because of our sin, denied us real satisfaction?

If the Messiah had not suffered the horrific thirst of the cross we would be eternally condemned to

crushing futility and perpetual barrenness! Our deepest thirsts would never be slaked. The vacuum inside us would never be filled.

☑ We would be like the young woman who as part of her suicide note wrote a twisted paraphrase of Psalm 23 that begins: **“King Heroin is my shepherd. I shall always want”** and ends: **“Surely heroin addiction shall stalk me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the damned forever.”**

☆ Praise God, Jesus did willingly experience the most desperate deprivation! Because he said, **“I am thirsty”** we can be filled. Because he said, **“I am thirsty”** we can be content. Because he said, **“I am thirsty”** we can be whole.

Even today, the Holy Spirit is saying: Do not be one of those who {Jer 17:13} **“will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the LORD, the spring of living water.”** {Jn 7:37-39} **“Let anyone who is thirsty come to [Jesus] and drink. Whoever believes in [him] ...rivers of living water will flow from within them.’**

This is the Word of the Lord.