

WHO IS JESUS

John 7:25-44

Our reading today begins just after Jesus has again arrived in Jerusalem, this time secretly, for the Feast of Tabernacles where he teaches the people. The people were amazed at his teaching and apparently many had never heard him speak before – indeed John doesn't record any previous teaching by Jesus in Jerusalem. In his teaching, Jesus first of all makes it clear that everything he's saying comes from the Father who is the source and goal of his life and then Jesus establishes a connection with Judaism. As far as Judaism was concerned the issue was Jesus' attitude towards the Law. Jesus would have been well aware that the Jews would remember his healing on the Sabbath in Jerusalem at the pool of Bethesda that I spoke on a few weeks ago. Jesus points out once again that there are exceptions to the Sabbath Law and that the important thing is not the letter of the Law but the redemptive purposes that lay at the heart of the Law. Then at the beginning of our reading the argument turns to whether or not Jesus is the Christ. So, as we study this passage together, the relevant verses will be displayed on the screen, or you can find the main passage on page [***] of the church Bibles.

The crowds that Jesus has been teaching are wondering if the Jewish authorities believe Jesus is the Messiah – the Christ – look at verses 25 to 27:

“At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ? But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no-one will know where he is from."” (verses 25-27)

The people aren't surprised that the Jewish authorities are trying to kill Jesus; rather they're surprised at the bold public nature of Jesus' public proclamations in the face of this threat. They're also surprised at the lack of response from the Jewish authorities. Why aren't they arresting Jesus on the spot? Some Jews of these times believed that

no-one would be aware of the origin of the Messiah on the basis scripture such as Malachi 3:1, and Daniel 9:25, although this view wasn't universally held. Remember the scribes who told Herod and the wise men where the Messiah would be born and look at verses 41 and 42 of our reading. Anyway, as we shall see later when we look at verses 41 and 42, the people don't know as much about Jesus' earthly human origins as they think – he's not born in Nazareth or anywhere else in Galilee, but in Bethlehem. Jesus neither accepts nor refutes the position about the origins of the Messiah. Rather, he simply points out that though they could have been aware of his human origins, they don't know his true origin – see verses 28 and 29:

“Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, "Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, but I know him because I am from him and he sent me.” (verses 28-29)

Jesus is saying that his origin is from God the Father who is ‘real’ (rather than ‘true’ as the NIV puts it) and has indeed sent him. He's also saying that the Israelites who pride themselves on knowing God the Father, unlike the pagans around them, don't actually know God at all. The implication is that those who recognise Jesus for who he is do know God and that those who don't recognise Jesus don't know God, especially these people who have Jesus standing before them.

This audacious claim incenses the authorities, who attempt to seize him, but are frustrated – see verse 30:

“At this they tried to seize him, but no-one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come.” (verse 30)

Many of the people listening turn to Christ in faith, which angers the authorities – look at verses 31 and 32:

“Still, many in the crowd put their faith in him. They said, "When the Christ comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?" The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him.” (verses 31-32)

Finally the Jewish authorities are ready to sign an arrest warrant!

Verses 30 to 32 speak of the division of people into those who know

who Jesus is (and thus know God) and those who don't. There's always a division whenever the revelation of God through Christ Jesus confronts human beings.

They're trying to arrest Jesus, but he's looking forward to his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension see verses 33 and 34:

"Jesus said, "I am with you for only a short time, and then I go to the one who sent me. You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come."" (verses 33-34)

So Jesus moves steadfastly and deliberately forward in the will of the Father who directs his every movement. The authorities completely fail to understand his meaning – see verses 34 to 36:

"You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come." The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him? Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks? What did he mean when he said, 'You will look for me, but you will not find me,' and 'Where I am, you cannot come'?" (verses 34-36)

The authorities can't imagine that Jesus can take himself to where they can't find him, but Jesus is utterly secure from the machinations of the authorities until the hour appointed in eternity when he will go home to the Father's side, there to direct through his Spirit the realization of all his purposes across the ages. The mention of Greeks here is interesting as a little later (John 12:20-23) the arrival of some Greeks who come to question Jesus serves as the signal that the time of the crucifixion has now come.

We now move forward in time to the end of the festival and Jesus makes a dramatic statement – see verses 37 and 38:

"On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."" (verses 37-38)

Jesus isn't interrupting the ceremony, he's interpreting it. Here Jesus is thinking of the gift of the Holy Spirit and it's interesting that Jesus has just spoken of his departure and now he speaks of bestowing the Holy Spirit – which is of course consequent upon his departure.

The Holy Spirit will not be bestowed until after Christ's death, resurrection and ascension, see verse 39:

“By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.” (verse 39).

The Feast our text is referring to is the Feast of Tabernacles or booths, an important Jewish festival, rich in symbolism and one of only three festivals of the Jewish year for which a pilgrimage to Jerusalem was commanded. It was the final feast of the Israelite agricultural year celebrating the end of the harvest season and participants slept and ate in shelters or booths made of branches and by Jesus' time this festival had become tied to hopes for the coming of the Messiah. Little did the crowds realise that the Messiah had come and was standing amongst them. It is deeply moving to visualize the Saviour standing in the temple among the crowds of pilgrims, probably in the proximity of the altar to where water from the Pool of Siloam, fed by the Rogel spring, was carried each morning in a golden pitcher accompanied by the singing of the Hallel psalms (Psalms 113-118). When the golden pitcher reached the water gate three blasts on the shofar (ram's horn trumpet) were sounded. The water from the pitcher was poured into silver bowls which were then poured onto the altar as an offering to God. On the seventh day of the feast this was done seven times. The Talmud connects these ceremonies with both the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in the last days and the Lord's provision of water in the desert. Pouring at the Feast of Tabernacles makes it clear that the water is living or flowing and refers symbolically to the messianic age in which a stream from the sacred rock would flow over the whole earth (*cf.* J. Jeremias, *TDNT*, 4. 277f.). These water rites were not prescribed by OT Law, but had their origin in traditions going back at least several hundred years before Christ.

In the hot dry country of Israel, it's not surprising that water was used as a symbol of spiritual blessing. Isaiah also speaks of water as a blessing:

“The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.” (Isaiah 58:11 NIV)

and the book of Nehemiah specifically makes the link with spiritual blessing:

“You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst.” (Nehemiah 9:20 NIV)

Jesus’ words are to be understood against this background. He’s saying that he’s the fulfilment of all that the Feast of Tabernacles promises. He’s issuing an invitation and a promise. He’s calling on all who would come to him and to receive the life-giving blessing of the Holy Spirit. This Holy Spirit will be like a living, springing river within the heart (literally in the Greek, the belly) of the believer. It is also encouraging to note the global range of this gifting – the *anyone* and the *whoever* – the gift of the Spirit is just as universal as the gift of salvation. Here we need to remember the true breadth of this universality. Greek and other proselytes and no doubt pagan bystanders would have been present at the festival. Jesus’ gifts of salvation and the Spirit are truly for all mankind.

Jesus’ words here closely parallel his statements back in John chapter 4 when he was speaking to the Samaritan woman:

“Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 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.”” (John 4:13-14 NIV).

Again we see that Jesus’ words have universal meaning – they’re for Gentiles as well as Jews.

All we need to do is to be aware of our inner thirst and come to Jesus. There’s no lasting satisfaction in earthly things, in our hearts and souls we want something more. We’re thirsting for God. As Saint Augustine said: “Thou madest us for thyself, and our heart is restless, until it rest in thee.” But we do need to come to Jesus, not

materialism or Buddha or a bunch of legalistic rules. Jesus is the only way. Jesus is the answer to our deep thirst, but it's our responsibility to come and drink deeply of him. When we do that we not only satisfy our own thirst, but we receive such a deep and abundant blessing of God's Spirit that it wells up and flows out of us to others. We're fed by the Rogel spring of Jesus which will never fail or dry up. The Dead Sea is so salty that nothing lives in it. It's so salty and dead because water flows in, but it has no outlets. We mustn't be like the Dead Sea, we need to let God's Spirit flow into us and flow out again as we give out in service to others. If we do that we won't be Dead Sea Christians. Of course, we need to keep drinking to keep the blessings flowing into us as well. We do that by keeping close to Christ and abiding in and absorbing the scriptures

Our reading then turns to the reaction of the crowds to what's been happening. In verse 40 we are told that some thought he was the prophet that Moses had foretold:

"On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet."" (verse 40)

They are clearly reminded of Moses giving water from the rock to the people in the wilderness, and hence of Moses' prophecy of a 'prophet like me' (Deuteronomy 18:15).

Others wonder if Jesus is the Messiah, but some find difficulty with this because they think Jesus has a Galilean origin – see verses 41 and 42:

"Others said, "He is the Christ." Still others asked, "How can the Christ come from Galilee? Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" (verses 41-42)

OT scriptures (Micah 5:2) made it clear that the Messiah was to be of David's line and from Bethlehem, where Jesus was in fact born.

As is still the case today, Jesus provokes division – look at verse 43: "Thus the people were divided because of Jesus." (verse 43)

Some, like the authorities, wanted to seize him – but of course no one could do so because the time was not yet right – verse 44:

“Some wanted to seize him, but no-one laid a hand on him.” (verse 44)

Eventually even the Temple guards that had been dispatched to arrest Jesus back in verse 32 had to admit defeat and returned empty handed – verse 45:

“Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, “Why didn’t you bring him in?”” (verse 45)

So, what have we learned this morning about who Jesus is? We see that we mustn’t be like the crowds back in verse 27 and fail to recognize Jesus because of fanciful interpretations of scripture or misunderstandings about Jesus and who he is. Remember if we don’t recognise Jesus for who he is – the Son of God – then we can’t know God at all. Further we can’t attempt to tie Jesus down or limit who he is or what he stands for anymore than he could be restrained by the crowds or arrested before the Father ordained that the time had come. We see that Christ bestows the gift of the Holy Spirit upon all believers; he’s calling on all those who would to come to him and receive the Spirit poured out upon them. To receive not only that they may be refreshed themselves, but also that they may refresh others in their Christian service. This gift of the Spirit is for us all, for all believers, for *anyone* and for *whoever*. The gift of the Spirit is given to all believers, it’s just as universal as the gift of salvation. The crowds weren’t sure who Jesus was – some thought he was the Prophet, some thought he was the Christ and some just didn’t know. That’s still the situation today. People aren’t sure who Jesus is or even if he exists at all. Let’s just accept him as who he says he is – the Son of God the universal saviour and the universal giver of the Holy Spirit.

So in a moment of quietness, let me invite you all to turn to Jesus and acknowledge him as our Saviour and as our Lord and Master right now right here this morning, then we will immediately receive his free gifts of salvation and the outpouring of his Holy Spirit within us.