

# The Water of Life ...

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*A reflection for Good Friday, 18th April 2025, by the Vicar, the Revd Canon Jonathan Baker, in Beverley Minster.*

When Jesus on the cross says, *"I am thirsty"* - it's not the first time. Much earlier in John's gospel, there is a scene where Jesus was sitting by Jacob's well outside a village in Samaria. He says to a woman from the village, *"Give me a drink."* And that leads to a conversation in which Jesus says to the woman, *"If you knew who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."* And when she's puzzled by that, he 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."* This is a theme in John's gospel. In chapter 7, Jesus says, *"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture says, out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."* The living water, which is mentioned in these earlier moments in John's gospel are echoing passages in the Old Testament which speak of living water as a sign of life, of the renewal of all of God's creation and indeed, of the Spirit of God himself.

But here on Good Friday at the cross, the one who promises living water, the one who spoke as if he were the source of the water of eternal life itself, cries out, *"I am thirsty."* In Psalm 22 which the choir sang earlier, that thirst is both physical and spiritual. The one who is forsaken of God is poured out like water and says, *'My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws, you lay me in the dust of death.'* In the Psalms, the idea of thirst is often spiritual, as in Psalm 42, *'As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.'* And Psalm 63, *'O God, you are my God. I seek you. My soul thirsts for you. My flesh faints for you as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.'*

So Jesus's thirst isn't just a thirst for ordinary water: he's yearning for God; he knows that God is now his only hope; he is longing for God to come and rescue him. There is, of course, a theological dimension to all of this: Jesus suffers on the cross, not just as a wretched individual, unfortunate enough to suffer the wrath of the Roman Empire - he also suffers as the Son of Man, representing all of broken and fallen humanity.

And there are moments in John's gospel when Jesus asks his own followers about their own thirst, their own yearning. Right at the beginning, he asks two disciples of John the Baptist, *"What are you looking for?"* What is your desire? When we get to Easter morning, we shall see Mary at the tomb, frantic with grief and worry about what has happened to Jesus's body. When she's confronted by a question from the one she thinks is the gardener, *"Whom are you looking for?"* he says. It's a variation on the same theme - what is it your heart is really yearning for?

So I wonder, what about you and me? What are you thirsty for? When you strip away all the superficial impulses, all the distractions we use to paper over the emptiness underneath, what is left at the bottom, tugging at us, if only we will stop and drink: a longing for love, perhaps; a longing to be accepted and forgiven, perhaps; a longing to be able to forgive ourselves, perhaps; a deep yearning to know real peace, the peace that passes understanding, perhaps; or perhaps something else.

John's gospel speaks not only of living water, but also of good wine. Jesus's first miracle at the wedding of Cana, when the drink ran out and he turned an abundance of water into wine. On the night of his arrest, he spoke to his disciples of being the true vine and that those who abide in him will be fruitful and loving. But on the cross, when Jesus is thirsty, he is given sour wine. The one who produced the best wine at the wedding, the one who promises the new wine of the kingdom, receives on the cross only sour wine. It's a kind of reversal of the miracle at Cana.

Yet what John is telling us here is that the cross, where the good wine is turned into sour wine and where the one who gives living water is parched with thirst, it is Jesus's death on the cross that is the ultimate source of the water welling up to eternal life - and it is the blood of Christ that pours from his side as the spear goes in that becomes the new wine of the kingdom that we share at every Eucharist. And it's in the pouring out of Jesus's life that the love of God is revealed, that divine forgiveness is made available, that the peace that passes understanding is shared.

So this Good Friday, let us hear the words of Jesus, *"I thirst."* And make those words our own and marvel at the gift of the water of life gushing up from the depths of the saviour's thirst.