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Plug In!

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TEXT: John 7:37-39 (ESV)

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

I am a guitar player and I've played in a few bands over the course of my life. I remember on more than one occasion I have been thrown into a brief moment of panic when the sound wouldn't come out of my amplifier before I had to perform. I'm jiggling the wires, checking the knobs, muttering about my equipment, and then someone asks me that all important question: "Are you sure you're plugged in?" And sure enough, I see that I am not. And as soon as I do plug myself in, the power gets flowing and the sound comes out as it should.

Are you plugged in? That's a good question to be asking on this day when the Christian church observes Pentecost Sunday. You know the story: the gathered disciples of Jesus waiting in an upper room in Jerusalem for the power to come from on high that Jesus had promised them. Suddenly, the sound of a mighty rushing wind, the tongues of fire appearing over their heads, the gospel, the good news of God's mighty works through Jesus, spoken in languages, the many languages of the world, by these simple Galileans. The surprised and curious crowd amazed that they can understand these men speaking in their own language. The cynics saying they're just drunk. And Peter's sermon about Jesus, God's son, fulfilling all the Old Testament promises of salvation, the conviction,

the 3000 conversions and baptisms. And we see the power of God at work, in and through the disciples and this new mission community formed called the church. And we're told in scripture it wasn't a one-time thing. The scripture kept doing the same activity throughout the book of Acts: leading and guiding, convicting, teaching, stirring people's hearts through the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, just as Jesus had promised.

It's rather amazing when you stop and think about it. These disciples were not highly qualified leaders, recognized theologians. They weren't even close to perfect in their obedience to Jesus and faith in Him. But my oh my! The gospel spread like wildfire throughout the ancient world through their witnessing. And these disciples we see also had their lives changed in amazing ways. James and John, who were once so self-promoting, now are exercising sacrificial love and service and encouraging others to do so as well. Peter became a more effective leader and courageous of a teacher as we read about in Acts and in his New Testament letters. Saul, a hater of Christianity, became Paul the passionate proclaimer of Jesus Christ. And the movement grew and grew. Even through the darkest of times in history it grew, changing history in all kinds of good ways and marvelous ways. On and on it went through the centuries. The Roman Empire fell, but the church continued on. The Spirit of God at work was even happening in the Dark Ages. And we see in the Reformation, the Great Awakening, the revivals as churches of Jesus Christ established around the world, led millions to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

All of this was the working of the Holy Spirit, flowing like a mighty river through history, bringing new life to so many people. All of this was simply a fulfillment of a promise that Jesus made to anyone who will believe in him. He said one day, "If anyone thirsts, let them come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me," as the Scripture has said, "out of his heart or her heart shall flow. Rivers of living water." That's quite an image, isn't it? Rivers of living water. I see moving water, refreshing water, sparkling water, beautiful life, giving blessing all those who come in contact with it. I grew up living a couple of blocks away from the Yellowstone River in Montana, spent a lot of time in the banks of that river, fishing or just sitting and thinking and taking in its beauty or inner tubing down the river on hot summer days. It's a beautiful river fed by mountains, snow, and streams, powerful rushing rapids, calm, quiet stretches. And it gives life to the land and communities it runs through. And Jesus is not talking about just a river. He's talking rivers. That's a lot of flowing water and it's going to flow out of

our hearts. The heart is the control center – the mind and the will of a person. It'll be abundantly flowing through us and out of us into the lives of those around us.

You know, after this statement Jesus made, John, our gospel writer, makes an editorial comment about it. He says, "Jesus said this about the Holy Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive. For as yet, the Spirit had not been given because Jesus was not yet glorified on the cross." On Pentecost Day, though, after the cross and the resurrection, we see the spigot open up and rivers of living water began flowing into the lives of these disciples unto others. The Holy Spirit over the centuries has continued doing what happened on that first day of Pentecost: making unbelievers believers, growing the Church of Jesus Christ, changing people, shaping, molding, conforming born again believers into the image of Jesus, working through them as they speak of the Gospel of what God has done for them through the person of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit, I'm here to announce, is still among us. He has never left. He will continue doing his work until the last day of history. He will be our helper, our counselor, comforter, advocate, and friend, Jesus has promised. He will make living rivers of living water flow out of our hearts as we follow Jesus.

So on this Pentecost day, it's important that we take at least a brief look at who he is and what he does. First of all, who he is. He's God, the third person of the Trinity. He's not an IT, but a who. While we call God the Creator and Jesus the Redeemer, the best word we can use to describe the work of the Holy Spirit is He is the "sanctifier". He makes us holy before God, which means sets us apart for service to God, to honor God and glorify Him with our praise and obedience. Later on in church history, long after Pentecost, Martin Luther would testify of his power, the spirit's power, in this way. He said,

I believe I can't, by my own understanding or effort, believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and kept me in true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it united with Jesus in one true faith. And in this Christian church, day after day, he fully forgives my sins and the sins of all believers. And on the last day he'll raise me and all the dead and give me and all believers in Christ eternal life.

So the Spirit calls me to faith in Jesus through the telling of the gospel. No one can say Jesus is Lord without the Spirit, the Apostle Paul wrote. I am incapable of figuring that

out on my own. He opens my eyes to see who Jesus is, what He's done for me. He helps me to understand. He does this through the gift of the word, and the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion. And He moves me to hold out my empty hands and receive the gift of God's eternal life.

For many of us that began as infants at our baptism, where we were forgiven of our sins and marked as God's adopted children living in covenant with Him. And then he continues to work within us, showing us Jesus and all that he's accomplished. He's shaping us, sanctifying us, making us more loving, full of peace and joy and patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The fruit of the spirit. He gives us gifts of the Spirit to share with other believers. And he does all this marvelous, wonderful work through the means of the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, and the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. That's what the Apostle Creed says. First of all, in the church, the communion of saints. It's there he enlightens me amongst the saints, through the proclamation of the Gospel, pointing me to what Jesus has done at the cross and resurrection for the forgiveness of my sins. And after the confession of my sins, an absolution is given, pointing me to the cross and relieving me of my burdens and sore conscience. And when I come to the Lord's Supper, his word with the bread and wine tell me "you are forgiven." My body given for you, this is my blood shed for you. And through these means of grace, I am comforted and revived and refreshed in the Holy Christian Church with the forgiveness of sins. He sanctifies us through the published word as well. The Sword of the Spirit, which is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, as the writer of Hebrews says. It makes me holy by convicting, directing, and changing me, making me more loving and obedient like Jesus. The Spirit uses the word. He helps me, the spirit helps me, in my praying – works through me to effectively touch other people's lives with the Gospel. I'd be lost without him. My friend, the Holy Spirit, he is always with me and such a gift.

But sometimes we get disconnected, unplugged, and we miss the righteousness and peace and joy that God wants us to have. I'm reminded of a story from the car racing world: on February 2nd, 1985, the Daytona 500 auto race had just begun. The drivers were just beginning the third lap when all of a sudden the quarter million dollar car driven by professional driver Donny Allison, rolled to a stop on the infield side of the track. And when it was checked, they found out no one had filled it with gas. Can you imagine the embarrassment? During one of the top races in the country, one of the top

drivers in auto racing stalled because he'd run out of gas. Unfortunately, that's where many Christians are in their spiritual life, trying to drive and live the Christian life on an empty tank. It happens all too often, all too easily. In a variety of ways we neglect his word and let it just sit on the shelf, on the bookstand by my bed, hardly ever opened. I appreciate this thought from Pastor Gary Oliver. He says,

If a farmer doesn't plant seeds, he or she will never harvest a crop. It doesn't matter how weed-free the ground is, good seed must be planted and cultivated. In the same way we can only reap a harvest of purity and integrity by planting the good seed of God's Word into our lives.

Some stay away from the church community and shoot themselves in the foot that way: missing worship, fellowship with other believers. Others find it all too easy to let our prayer life become simply non-existent or perfunctory at best. And you see, I need these things, and so do you, at work in my life – the tools of the Spirit, His means of grace for our lives as followers of Jesus. They bring about those powerful rivers of living, water working in us and through us, giving us power to leave the past behind, as we hear the news of forgiveness for our sins. And power for the present, reminding us that we are not alone, but flanked by the powerful Holy Spirit of God, who flows through us as we let our light shine to words and deeds for the sake of the Gospel. He leads me into new adventures and is constantly at work, transforming me into something beautiful and confident, someone who does the right thing in God's sight and causes others to bring glory to Him and honor Him. Through these means of grace. He gives me assurance for even facing the future. He points me to the inheritance that awaits me at the end of my life in this world, when he will resurrect me and make me perfectly and eternally holy to live with my God, forever and ever in His Heaven.

He's quite a friend, quite a power to have at work in one's life. And now that we know that the same excitement and power that you sense in the story of Pentecost is still available in your life, let the rivers of living water flow. My encouragement today is to plug in. For the person who is not a follower of Jesus, that means saying yes to Jesus, turning to him and telling him You want to follow him and have him as your Savior and Lord and friend, and have this new life in the Spirit. And if you are a believer in Jesus and trusting him already for eternal life, act on these words of encouragement that Peter Marshall, a great gospel preacher from the past, wrote. He said,

God can still do great things for you, in you and through you. The old gospel song has it right. Have thine own way, Lord, have thine own way. Thou art the

potter. I am the clay. Mold me and make me after thy will. While I am waiting, yielded and still. That's it. We only have to be yielded, surrendered, willing, and the spirit will do the rest.

It's a matter of yielding ourselves to daily time studying the Word of God and prayer. Establish a regular appointment time with the Spirit and keep it – a half hour, start that way. Start with John's Gospel. And it's committing yourself to be a regular worshiper. If you can't get out of your home, then worship with us. But if you can, get into a local church and get involved. Just get plugged in. God has great, exciting plans for your life. That is why He has given us His Holy Spirit. And as you get yourself plugged in, the promise of Jesus, you will discover, is absolutely true. Out of your heart shall flow rivers of refreshing life-giving, living water.

I invite you to sing the closing prayer with me today. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Melt me. Mold me. Fill me. Use me. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Let's sing it.