

Sunday, June 4, 2017 – Pentecost Sunday
“Fly-Over Country”

John 7: 37-39

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV
Central Image – Single Focus

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Have you ever been on a flight that takes you over desolate places? I know you have because some on the coasts, and even some on the plains would say we live in it! And even though you might protest there is much life and beauty here, and you seek out those desolate places for camping, hiking, and quiet, let's be honest, if not for the modern conveniences and technology that make possible Lake Mead as a water source, air conditioning for comfort and speedy road travel to go elsewhere, it's unlikely that most of us would be living here either. That's evidenced by the mass exodus that starts this weekend with the kids out of school and people looking for escape from the heat.

We all have “fly-over lands” in our lives, memories or relationships that are desolate and filled with tumble-weeds and blowing sand. Those flyover lands can be people – an ex, an estranged family member, a friend turned enemy, a homeless person begging for change. They can be places – an old workplace, a broken home, the site where a loved one died. They can be things – a deceased spouse's clothes, a precious heirloom stolen from you, a mass on a PET-Scan. They can be memories – stuffed away because they dredge up past sadness we'd rather forget, hidden because they remind us of happiness long since lost, buried because of hurts we've given and bruises we've taken. In these places wagging fingers, torching tongues and piercing memories remind us of our past sin. Desert demons live in these badlands, pointing out our ugly duplicity, ongoing pride, lustful idolatry and miserable memories. What is our response? Nothing to see her. Flyover.

Yet flying over doesn't solve the problem. Oh we can go around it, for a time but eventually the things we want to flyover throw themselves back into our lives. It's time to stop

denying these painful people, places, things and memories and come to the only One who can quench our thirst. Water is a big theme in John's Gospel, as over and over again we see Jesus' mastery over it – changing water into wine. He speaks of “living water” and being reborn through water and the Spirit. He heals a disabled man at a pool and walks on the Sea of Galilee, and all this in the handful of pages before this text today. Later on he'll do more healing and wash His disciples feet. Water is connected to Jesus giving the Spirit, and cleansing, and healing.

Now keep all this in mind as we delve into our text – Jesus is at the temple in Jerusalem for the seventh and final day of the Feast of Tabernacles or Sukkot, a Hebrew festival that happens in the fall. This holiday had a special connection to the temple since the days of King Solomon almost a thousand years earlier. On each of the seven mornings a priest filled a golden pitcher with water as the choir sing from Isaiah 12:3. These were words of hope, repeated again and again, meant for people about to go through painful war, slavery and exile, people despondent over the people, places, things and memories that dredge up all they've lost. And there, words spoken to people stuck in the flyover land come with this promise: “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.” Water was then poured on the base of the altar. On the seventh day the priest poured water seven times into a silver funnel surrounding the altar.

It was at this particular moment, of the water of life poured at the altar in hope for the most desolate of times, on this particular, “last and greatest day of the Feast” of Tabernacles when Jesus, the Teacher who would normally stay seated while teaching instead broke tradition, broke every appearance of appropriate, solemn reverence, broke centuries of protocol and dramatically stood up, and did what is called in Greek, “ἔκραξεν,” that is He cried out, projecting from way, way down in His belly, yelling for the attention of everyone around Him, for everyone to hear, “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.’”

And every person flying over desolate places would not be able to help but stop and turn and see and hear as their prayers for Spirit-filled, cleansing, healing waters come gushing forward from that altar in a way they could hardly have expected. Jesus, you see, is the new temple and from his spear-pierced side will flow the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Yes, Jesus knows the pain of fly-over lands. Oh God, Jesus knows! All the pains of human history are captured in his fly-over land called Golgotha. The horror is expressed in these infamous words in John 19:28, "I thirst." In one ironic twist for the ages, the raging river of life flowing throughout the book of John is reduced to just a drop until it completely dries up. Look. Blood and sweat are caked to his cheeks. His lips are cracked and swollen. Tight nerves threaten to snap as death pangs its morbid melody. Then witness the Roman spear thrust and a sudden flow of blood and water. Here is the temple, crushed and cursed by the sin of your life and mine, every desolate soul haunted by their flyovers whatever they may be, whether person, place, thing or memory. And how did people respond when they saw this bloody mess? Flyover.

But not so fast. Don't deny these painful people, places, things and memories. Come to this Jesus, crushed and yet alive forevermore. He's the only one who can quench your thirst. Watch the Holy Spirit He sends flood your baptismal font, forgive your filth, defeat your death. Hear a loud cry of comfort and life spoken to every desolate soul's forbidden person, place, thing and memory. His living water has one destination – the fly-over lands of your life! In Jesus' name, Amen.