

WELCOME 2 February 2020 – 4 Epiphany '20 A

RIVERS OF LIVING WATER: WHY?

John 7:37-39 & Revelation 7:13-17

Good morning & Welcome to Living Water Fellowship! Special welcome to our visitors & guests...It is wonderful you're all here! It's our privilege & joy to serve you in worship today. Please stay for morning tea after worship helps us get to know each other better.

Last week I left you with this from Is 52:

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger who brings good news, the good news of peace & salvation, the news that the God of Israel reigns! – Is 52:7

I promised we'd spend the whole month of February exploring the implications of that verse/others like it for each one of us...especially when that describes us (people who have been given the best news ever) **AND** who live also with this command:

*Jesus came & told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven & on earth. Therefore, **go make disciples of all the nations**, baptize them in the name of the Father & the Son & the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. Remember, I am with you always, to the very end of the age." – Mt 28:18-20*

God chooses his church, US, to bear his hope/life to the world. In every time & place God calls his people to something greater than they are currently experiencing so that in the power of the risen Jesus His people are propelled outward into the world as people with one story to share...The good news of God's reign over all things through the life death & resurrection of Jesus Christ...and under the strength of the Spirit to labour for the Father's harvest of hearts & lives for all eternity...to see people transformed forever by his mighty saving love.

We'll explore and experience that together today & for the month of February as we discover what Jesus really meant when he described those who believe in him as having "rivers of living waters" flowing from our hearts...

Let's pray & then we'll get stuck into it!

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord Jesus you walk among us on seashores and sidewalks. You call us to sail out of our snug harbours into the uncharted waters of faith...to wander from our predictable paths to follow You into the wild & raging footsteps of the kingdom; to leave the comfort of our homes & accompany You into the uncomfortable places & conversations we usually avoid.

Speak to us, Lord Jesus through your Spirit of Grace: of that hope which is our anchor; of that peace which is our rock; of that love which is our refuge and of that joy that is our reward...We pray in your Name...alone our Lord & Saviour. Amen

4 EPIPHANY '20 A – RIVERS OF LIVING WATER: WHY?

FAITH CHAT:

1. If you won the lottery who would be the first person you'd tell?
2. Please share one place where you experienced God's presence this week.
3. Please share a time when Jesus made a difference in your life. This/Jesus/that

God has called Living Water Fellowship to be a vibrant Christian community that glorifies God by inviting all people to become disciples of Jesus who grow in his grace and go in his power to show his love to the world.

Most of us should probably have that memorized by now. You should. We developed it together; it's right in front of you every Sunday & we've been together 7 years. 2 years ago we spent weeks re-configuring our strategic plan & everyone involved said **THAT** reflected us as a vision of who we are to be as a congregation... That's who we know we are to be as a community drawn together by the Holy Spirit in the power of the good news of Jesus' life/death/resurrection. It should be in ready recall like your pin number

But for just a minute I don't want to talk about us...I'll get to us...but let's look at this piece first: *inviting all people to become disciples of Jesus* Research says less than 1 in 5 Xn adults ever invite someone to faith in Jesus Christ. In the Western Church, only ^{b/}_t 15 & 20% of all adult Christians ever invite someone to faith in Jesus Christ. I don't mean invite them to a BBQ...or to worship...or to a concert, event, performance kid's program being held at or sponsored by their church... but to honestly from the heart share what God has done for them in Jesus Christ in a way that invites them to trust the good news of death's defeat/hell's overthrow/sin's forgiveness...to honestly do what you just did...share a time when Jesus made a difference in your life & then follow that up with something like...Has anything like that ever happened to you? If I told you it could, would you like it to? This isn't about theological expertise ...Biblical knowledge...debating skill... philosophical proficiency...or even guilt...this is the heartbreaking reality that fewer than 1 in 5 adult Xns ever say to someone they know, "You know...there was this time when I was thirsty & there was water...& right now you look like you could use a drink..."

Now I want to talk about us...This is us. Living Water Fellowship is not an isolated Xn entity hanging out in the Guide Hall just waiting for something to happen. We are part of God's mission to gather his eternal harvest *FROM THIS CITY*. So we need to always think about us only in the context of God's design *FOR THIS CITY*...in fact the whole of creation...but primarily *FOR THIS CITY*. And that design is this...Rev 7:17 - *For the Lamb on the throne will be their Shepherd. He will lead them to springs of life-giving water. And God will wipe every tear from their eyes. The Father has in Christ reconciled all creation to himself & 1 day he will bring all things to completion...to a fullness unsurpassed...to a joy unparalleled...to peace w/o end & an intimacy with him that is the essence of love & compassion & healing & restoration. All. Things. New.*

Martin Luther recommended pinching yourself to see if you were in that day yet. Cause if pinching still hurts; we ain't there yet. So between where we are & where we are headed there's only one option...this: "*Anyone who believes in me may come & drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from their heart.'*" God chooses his church, US, to bear his hope/life/love/salvation to the world. To live so intimately connected to Jesus that our lives are an overflow of his life poured out *FOR* us & *INTO* each one of us.

NT says this: *Christ's love controls us. Since we believe Christ died for all, we believe that we have all died to our old life. He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died & was raised for them...This means anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new creation. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! All of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead. "Come back to God!" For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be sin for us so we could be made right with God through Christ. – 2 Cor 5:14-21 Note all the plurals there. Not talking about Paul & Silas or Paul & Timothy. He's talking about the church*

When Leonie & I were in Wollongong 2 weeks back...we were reminded that the **Great Commission** **Go make disciples of all the nations**, baptize them in the name of the Father & the Son & the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. Remember, I am with you always, to the very end of the age. is not just a good "suggestion." The verbs are all imperative indicative participial plural...which means the assumption is that as you are going (not hoping folks somehow come to you) going, making disciples, baptizing & teaching obedience/conformity to Christ, Christ will be present in all you do - guiding your steps - shaping your words - protecting your heart - granting you wisdom & boldness & opportunity as his Spirit moves ahead of you. And when we do that...go, make disciples, baptize, teach obedience/conformity to Christ... honestly from the heart share what God has done for you in Jesus Christ in a way that invites someone else to trust the good news of death's defeat/hell's overthrow/sin's forgiveness...

Here's what happens... Ian Robinson is a Lecturer in Mission/Evangelism/Leadership @ United Theological College & Charles Sturt University... He looked at a ton of input from congregations all over Oz... You know what he discovered? the strongest influence in overall congregational vitality is, by a clear margin, Faith-Sharing When we do that... go, make disciples, baptize, teach obedience/conformity to Christ... When we announce the good news of reconciliation to the Father through the work of Christ... others live forever & we thrive. "The strongest influence in overall congregational vitality is, by a clear margin, Faith-Sharing." We get closer to our vision of being a vibrant Xn community only when we speak for Christ pleading "Come back to God." That's an unmistakable unavoidable certainty.

BUT... If we treat Great Commission like a good suggestion & the task speaking for Christ pleading "Come back to God!" as if it's someone else's job... not our thing... Here's what he says: "Without a desire to be faith-sharing in everyday life, however, Church relationships will be pragmatic, programmatic & predictable..." You ever been part of that sort of church... Pragmatic – Who's gonna fix the toilets? Programmatic – Who's stuck with kids' ministry this year? Predictable – Let's get rid of the pastor? Why are we running out of money? He left off the 4th P – pain in the neck... who wants to be part of that? He finishes his report: '...the gentle art of faith-filled conversation is the single most change-making task a church can undertake.' Not a new youth ministry. Not a new kids' program. Not a drop-in shelter for whoever needs to drop-in... faith-filled conversation... honestly from the heart sharing what God has done for you in Jesus Christ in a way that invites someone else to trust the good news of death's defeat, hell's overthrow, & sin's forgiveness... share a time when Jesus made a difference in your life & then follow that up with something like... Has anything like that ever happened to you? If I told you it could, would you like it to?

And I apologize for not making that abundantly clear before or fully equipping you to do just that with your friends, your families, your kids, your workmates, your neighbours... I apologize for not giving you the tools you need to simply say to someone you care about... "You know... there was this time when I was thirsty & there was water... & right now you look like you could use a drink..." hurt/healing alone/family down/joy

This isn't about theological expertise ... Biblical knowledge... debating skill... philosophical proficiency... or even guilt... but for the next 3 weeks you & I are going to practice looking each other in the eye & offering living water... of speaking the gospel as best we understand it... of practicing a few simple ways to engage someone we already know for their eternal sake... and for our obedience to the command of Christ... and our becoming who we know we are called to be...

We're going to start right here: *God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them.* - 2 Cor 5:19 Let's say that together. Now... great, but what does that mean? Simply this: In Jesus, God comes personally to us, to rescue & renew all things by Christ's life, death & resurrection. Through Jesus God reclaims the world to himself & reunites all things in his love just as he planned from the very beginning... and you are part of his plan. "You know... there was this time when I was thirsty & there was water... & right now you look like you could use a drink..." hurt/healing alone/family down/joy confused/direction angry/peace Never forget

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Let's pray... Lord Jesus take over. Take all of me & all that I have for your kingdom. You alone are my hope, my future, my security, my peace & my joy. Use my life so that many among my acquaintances in this city and beyond may be drawn to you to worship you as their King. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.