

A Storytelling Commentary on John 7:37-39

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This is a very short piece of Jesus' long talk (chapters 7 and 8) at the Festival of Booths in John 7 and 8. It is an introduction to a part of Jesus' longer discourse. It has been selected as part of the lectionary because of the theme of the Spirit.

There are two verbal threads that will facilitate memorization:

1. "Out of the believers heart" and "which believers in him were to receive" (7.38, 39)
2. "Now he said this about the Spirit" and "For as yet there was no Spirit" (7.39)

The content of this story is similar to Peter's speech on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit is described as a river of living water flowing out of the believer's heart. It's a different metaphor for the Spirit than that present in the Pentecost story, which is about the Spirit as a mighty wind enabling believers to speak in different languages. In this story the theme is the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive, but that was not to happen until Jesus was glorified then and now. For John's audiences, the implication is that the gift of the Spirit is now available to those who believe because Jesus has been glorified in his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.

As in all the speeches in John, Jesus' voice here is warm and inviting. He is not making a theological pronouncement but is instead inviting John's listeners to be open to receiving the gift of the Spirit already present in their hearts.

If you follow the lectionary, I recommend that you just tell the Pentecost story on this Sunday. It's a long story and is enough for one day. However, I wanted to give you at least an introduction to the John 7 passage if you decide to use it as well.