

18th Sunday after Pentecost: Jer 29:1, 4-7; Psalm 66:1-11; 2 Timothy 2:8-15; Luke 17:11-19

“Blessed are the Lawn Spigots, for they shall irrigate their communities.” And some may say to me, “But Heather, I do not believe that to be actually one of the Beatitudes that was given to us by Lord Jesus.” And you would be correct. However, I would like to use the lawn spigot as an illustration for today’s epistle. There is a four-line saying in Paul’s Epistle today to Timothy that encompasses within each line every possible relationship that we can have to Jesus Christ. Each line contains entire doctrines. And so, for the sake of an analogy toward dissecting the four-line saying: today each one of you is a lawn spigot.

And so, each one of you is a lawn spigot. And once your lawn spigot was completely shut off. No water was running through it. But then somebody told you about Jesus. And you received Jesus as your Savior, and you were baptized, and your lawn spigot was turned on. As Jesus says to us: “Whoever believes in me, as Scripture said, rivers of living water will flow from within them,” (Jn 7:38). This illustrates for us the first line of the saying from Paul to Timothy where he states: “If we have died with him, we will also live with him.” This is salvation. It is a free gift from God apart from works, lest anyone should boast, (Eph 2:9). If we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we will be saved (Acts 16:31). Our lawn spigots have been turned on. In baptism, we are united to Christ in his death which he died to wash us clean of sin and death and we have eternal life. The first line of today’s saying is the doctrine of salvation.

The second line is about keeping our lawn spigots running, or specifically, as Paul says to us today: “If we endure, we will also reign with him.” To endure is what the psalmist speaks of today saying: “For you O God, have proved us; you have tried us just as silver is tried. You brought us into the snare; you laid heavy burdens upon our backs. You let enemies ride over our heads; we went through fire and water.” I mean, let me ask you, after receiving Jesus as your savior, have any of you ever felt tried? Have you felt a burden upon your backs? And some may say to me, “But God would not burden us,” to which I would respond, Jesus did not say we would not have a burden but that, “His burden is light,” because he helps us carry it. As such, can you relate to the notion that God has

led or is leading you through both fire and water? This is as the apostle James explains when he tells us: “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, and sisters, when you encounter trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Allow perseverance to finish its work so that you may be mature and complete not lacking anything.” Which is a doctrine of transformation. Of growing up into the fullness of Christ. This is what Paul speaks of in saying we should no longer conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:2). The doctrine of transformation is about pursuing godliness and the mortification of sin. This is what it means to endure. We follow Jesus not only as savior, but also as Lord doing everything that he asks of us thereby permitting the Holy Spirit to transform us. And in so doing, not only do we bear fruit, but we store up for ourselves treasures in heaven. And I believe the treasures in heaven will be the souls we have reached or influenced or led. But also, we are told we will be rewarded for our faithfulness. Jesus tells us that if we are faithful with the little things now, we will be entrusted with much later (Luke 16:10). When he comes again to reign, he will designate us as pillars in the temple of God. And so, we keep our lawn spigots running which permits rivers of living water to flow through us to others in order to bear fruit and we will reign with Jesus in positions of authority later.

The third saying to us is if we deny him, he will also deny us. To deny Jesus as Savior, is to never permit God to turn on the lawn spigot to begin with, but to reject the living water outright. If we do not receive Jesus as our Savior, Jesus will deny us on the day of judgment. There is no living water at all flowing through us. This is explained to us in 1 John 5:12-13 where the apostle John tells us: “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” This is the doctrine of eternal damnation. And nobody likes to talk about it. Jesus speaks more of Hell than anyone else in the Bible. Jesus speaks of both heaven and hell as real places. And to reject Jesus is to never permit your lawn spigot to be turned on in the first place. To reject Jesus is to reject living water.

The fourth saying is controversial, but I will share with you what I believe it to be saying. The fourth saying is: “If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.” Once we are born of God, we are God’s children whom

he will never disown because God has placed his Spirit in our Hearts as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come. When God guarantees something, God guarantees that something. We are told, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. Period. If salvation is a gift we can lose, then baptize me and slay me on the spot for I would rather die than risk losing eternal life. And if anyone *could* lose it, *I would*. And so, what I believe Paul is saying, is that once we have been saved, if we live in a faithless manner, meaning we have accepted Jesus as Savior, but we do not follow him as Lord, our walk will be faithless. We will not irrigate our communities. Our Spigots will be clogged. But because God is faithful, God will remain faithful with his guarantees to us. If we continue in sin, God will discipline us to correct us, and if we continue to disobey, God may as a result of unfaithfulness take us out of the world. We are told of this in 1 Corinthians 5:5 where Paul instructs to hand an unrepentant sinner over to Satan “for the destruction of the flesh so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.” And so, we see that our flesh dies, but our spirits, once saved, are saved. If we continue to walk unfaithfully, God may take our lawn spigots to the Ace Hardware in the sky, but God will never be unfaithful to the Holy Spirit planted within us for God cannot deny God’s self. I base this interpretation on Paul’s letter to the Corinthians wherein he states: “no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.” If we live as faithless, we will enter heaven with only the bare foundation of Jesus Christ to stand upon and no additional good thing built upon it, and God forbid we should live in such an ungrateful manner. Yet many do. Today in our Gospel only one person out of ten people whom Jesus made clean, returns to thank Jesus to fall at his feet as Lord. But Jesus doesn’t run after the nine and re-afflict them with leprosy. Once we are washed clean, Jesus will not “un-wash” us. This is why Jesus says to us: “Everyone the Father gives me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will never drive away...I shall lose none of those he has given Me...For it is My Father’s will that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have

eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” Those are the requirements. To look to the Son and believe in him. Just as the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness. It was the only pre-requisite to live. Look to and believe in God’s provision for life, and live. This is the doctrine of eternal security. If we could live faithfully enough to save ourselves, why did Jesus come to establish a new covenant? We already had a perfectly good covenant whereby to approach God through good works. We can only be saved by God’s faithfulness.

But if we be saved by God’s faithfulness alone, do we, as the Apostle Paul asks of us – do we continue in sin, so that Grace may abound? (Rom 6:12). God forbid! Sin grieves the Holy Spirit and clogs our spigots. And the best way to overcome sin is through a torrent of living waters. This unclogs our spigots like a fire hydrant. The word of God is like a fire hydrant unto gravel within a lawn spigot. Jesus taught us how to turn on the fire hydrant in that the best way to overcome sin is to do as he did when he was tempted in the wilderness. Jesus had committed scripture to memory and wielded it against the evil one. The best way to walk uprightly before God, is through knowledge of God’s word and committing God’s word to your heart through memory and application. And when we mess up, we repent and permit Jesus to wash our feet so that we may renew our walk with Him. This causes our spigots to run freely, and God can work through you to irrigate entire communities.

Because the true nature of things is that sometimes we have a giant rock in our spigot, and we don’t want to let it go. We believe it to be a necessary rock or at least one that we are familiar with, and we just can’t seem to dislodge it. Yet through the grace of the Holy Spirit, we eventually let it go. And we think: “Whew, we got rid of that giant rock.” But then, God starts to point out to us pebbles. The pebbles are insidious sins like grumbling. Or criticizing. Or doubting. Or indifference. Or losing one’s patience. Or busyness with the things of this world. Or love of material things. Or pride. Or inability to forgive. Or self-pity. Or self-righteousness. Or, or, or or...and I don’t actually *know* what your personal pebbles are, but *you* know. And Jesus knows. Jesus says, “my sheep know my voice,” and so if Jesus is telling you to cast aside a specific pebble, you know what he is asking of you and so do it. Let your yes be “yes” and your no “no.” Say “yes” to God and “no” to the sin. Anything in between is of the evil one because it is our rationalization that hinders our faith. We can

reason ourselves into or out of anything and especially in following Jesus as Lord because discipleship is difficult. Yet this is how we are taken from glory to glory (2 Cor 3:18) and how God grows us up more and more into the image of his Son. And each pebble you toss aside at the direction of Lord Jesus gives you confidence towards God. As the Apostle John says to us: "Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God, and we will receive from Him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what is pleasing in his sight."

As such, and in summary, may you never look at a lawn spigot the same again. And more importantly, do not let the evil one stuff gravel into your spigot. And do not of yourselves stuff gravel into your own spigots. *Amen.*