

Text: Ezekiel 47.1-9

Theme: The river of Life

Goal: The Living of Water brings forgiveness and life

INTRODUCTION

Today I have the joy of meeting you and knowing this temple and God's action in this congregation. Is this temple, this house of God, this congregation, relevant for you? Why? I would like to share with you a word of the Lord spoken by prophet Ezekiel, speaking of the temple and its relevance for the people of God. This word is from Ezekiel 47.1-9.

The prophet Ezekiel was called by God at a time when the people of Israel were in exile, the temple was destroyed and they were far from their land. What Israel most valued was taken away from them: the land and the temple. So, Ezekiel is sent to them by God to show why the glory of God has departed from Israel, and how this glory could return. Ezekiel speaks of a new temple, not a physical building, but a temple which has the blessing and the grace of God, a temple from where it flows a river that gives forgiveness and life and transforms all things wherever it flows.

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The prophet Ezekiel knew how much the people of Israel needed this water of life, because their idolatry had carried them not only into exile in Babylon, but into spiritual death. They were without God, separated from his grace, dead in their sins. His spiritual adultery, revealed by running after other gods, showed this death and this spiritual desert.

This is the reason that the words of the prophet are so important and timely for us as well. For if we look at our lives we see in them that death is also present, in the several times that we exchanged the true God by the gods that we create and in which we place our trust, as power, fame, money, or in sins which we like and we are unable to surpass. We think we can avoid the condemnation of God for ourselves; after all, we think, "I don't steal, I don't kill, I try to take care of my family. I'm not that bad. God must acknowledge something good in me too." We

try to justify our mistakes before God, instead of recognizing the total lack of spiritual life in us and seek him for life.

And here comes the good news of God's love: if we lack life, he creates it. This is the image that the prophet Ezekiel shows. Amid the desert of death, there is a river of life coming out of the temple of God and bringing life to all. The prophet highlights four things to the people of Israel exiled in Babylon and also to God's people nowadays, anywhere:

1st. The source of the river is God. The river runs from the temple, the place where God is present. God makes this water run and reach everyone. This happened on the day of our Baptism. It is in the water of Baptism that He promised to be our God and assured that we are His people, His children. And again and again God assured this promise and truth, by His Word and by the Holy Supper, when He says to each one of us - eat and drink - this is my body, this is my blood - for the forgiveness of your sins. Here we see the importance of the Church and this congregation, not just for the temple itself, but for what God offers inside it, in his Word and in the sacraments.

2nd. The direction of the river is out. The river does not flow back to the temple or around it, just to give water for those who are inside it, but it flows out, for those who have not yet received the water of life. So is the Christian Church. It exists because the Church was placed in the world and received from Christ the mandate to go to all nations, baptizing and teaching. This is your reason for being – to reach everyone, to go to all people, to share with all what we received from God. This work happens here in Africa, happens in Brazil and, in a very blessed way, is also happening in Mozambique.

3rd. The growth of the river is exponential. Each five hundred meters, the river becomes wider and deeper, until it is impossible to cross it. This is what happens with the Kingdom of God: he enters the world, expands, transforms from a mustard seed into a tree where even birds can shelter. A small group of twelve at the ascension of Jesus, over three thousand at the day of Pentecost and, according to the book of Acts, day by day the Lord was adding, multiplying, and connecting more and more people to Jesus. This river also came to you and want to continue running around the world.

4th. The result of the river is life-giving. *“Where the river flows everything will live.”* This is the wonderful act of God, transforming the spiritual desert into a place of life, taking away the sins and giving his life in Christ, the eternal and abundant life, life for everyone. The water comes from the throne of God's

grace and runs towards people, making the love of God a reality for all people, bringing life to all.

The truth taught by God through Ezekiel is that the river of life that flows from God's throne of grace gives life to all. Where the river flows, it creates life. It is through Christ, the Word of God, by Baptism, in the Lord's Supper, that life flows and makes the grace of God ours. This is the way God comes to us and makes us His Church, by the river of life that flows into eternity and that brings life, eternal life.

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If we move quickly into history, five centuries after Prophet Ezekiel wrote this text, we will find Jesus sitting on the edge of a well, talking with a Samaritan woman. The text is in John 4. Draw your attention to what Jesus says in verses 13 and 14: *"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."* Jesus' message is clear: He doesn't relieve or decrease thirst, but kills it, eliminates it. Thirst, never more! This is your and my reality. In Jesus, life and salvation are eternally guaranteed by the grace of God through faith.

But have you ever wondered how many people are thirsty in this world? Not just a thirst for water, but thirsty of the water of life? Think about people with whom you live:

- It can be that person who sits at your dining table or in your living room;
- Someone with whom you talk at the door of your home or in the lift of your building;
- Or one classmate or co-worker with whom you are every day;
- Maybe even someone who already is a Church member, but still is not really connected to Jesus by faith.

Think on these people. Have they already quenched their thirst? Do they know the grace of God that flows from the temple through the river of life? Who could speak to them about this water that quenches their thirst? If you stop talking, will they have another opportunity to hear? And if they don't receive the water of life? And if the river of life doesn't reach them? Can you identify at least one person who needs to hear about the Savior? More than one? Will you be

silent? And when will you start speaking? It's so easy to tell others what Jesus has done in our lives, about the forgiveness that he brought us, from the everlasting life that he has prepared for us, from this river that flows out toward all, that increases in volume every second, which brings eternal and endless life. After all, speaking about the love of God, about the water of life, about what God has given us, isn't it natural? Listen to what Jesus says, "*the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life*", not only for yourself but also for those who live around you.

I like an illustration of Martin Luther, with which he defines God's mission in the world. Luther compares the preaching of the gospel to a stone thrown into the water, producing ripples in concentric circles, waves succeeding and extending one after another, until they reach the shore. This is the Church's missionary task. This mission began in the heart of God, became a human being in Christ, was given to the Church by the Savior Himself, and keeps going around the world, the waves pushing ever and ever, one pushing the other until they reach the shore. These waves went through Judea, Samaria, came to Africa and Brazil, and need to go to the ends of the world. You are part of these waves of the gospel. Life has come to you. And the question that remains is: will these waves pass through you to reach other people, or are you the shore that prevents its advance? This is the Church's work, the reason why the Church exists, as Luther says, "For the Church is this: Convert others to the faith and call to repentance."

This is our work as Christian Churches, and no matter if you are a pastor or not, whether young or old, man or woman. The task belongs to all because life is for everyone. The river of life came to you. The life of God already exists in your heart, and this is what makes all the difference. That's why every time God puts us in touch with His Word, we go back home changed, forgiven and prepared to share with others the good news of salvation. And all this prepares us for the great and special time, in the new heaven and the new earth, listening to the invitation of Jesus: "Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life." (Revelation 22:17)

CONCLUSION

Life is for all. Christ is for all. The love of God is in our hearts. Yes, we are different. "*We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard*". Amen.

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