

Revelation 22:17

Some years ago there was a commercial on television in which a poor soul was crawling across a sandy desert. He had one hand at his throat and was gasping for something to quench his unbearable thirst while the sun angrily beat down upon him. He crawled along until it looked like he could crawl no more when he spotted a refreshment stand where he would be able to find relief for his parched mouth and throat. He crawled up to the stand and the man inside offered him a cool drink, but the poor soul refused to take it. "No," he said, "I really had my heart set on a Stroh's beer." And off he crawled into the desert.

What made the commercial a success was its absurd humor. And yet, though it may appear silly, far-fetched, absurd to us, it proclaims, in truth, the spiritual attitude of most people today. "Come," we hear in our text, "let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price." That water of life is being offered and given here again today. This is the refreshment stand, an oasis of life in the midst of our desert world. But who comes? Thousands flock to the wineries on the weekends, and yet few come to hear the words of the living Savior. Thousands fill the ball park when the Cardinals are in town, but few fill their ears with God's words of grace in Christ.

Now this is not a complaint. Rather, this is showing amazement at the mercy of God. How? Because you are here today. Out of the millions of poor souls crawling here and there through life, you crawled here today. Your ears are attentive to what God is saying to you. Your hearts are set upon your Savior. Your desire is to eat and drink His true flesh and blood. We don't have Stroh's beer here for you today. We don't have a one-thousand seat auditorium, or a vibrant praise band leading you in worship, or an entertaining preacher to captivate your attention. But we do have Jesus. His words, His Sacraments are here for you. His cup of life is for your parched soul. His grace and forgiveness is for you no matter who you are, no matter where you have been crawling. Are you here to drink freely? Are you here to quench your unbearable thirst? Then thanks be to God. For "no one can come to Me," says Jesus, "unless (God) the Father draws him."

Many years ago, perhaps back when that Stroh's commercial was being aired, a well-known evangelist came to a large city in the Midwest to preach at a Christian worship service. When the service was over, a man who had been in the audience went up to the preacher and said, "I just want you to know that I don't believe a word you said." The evangelist had to catch a plane to the West Coast where he was scheduled to preach the next day, and he told the man, "There are people in Los Angeles thirsting for the good news of Jesus. I don't have time to waste arguing with you. Just go ahead and go to hell." And he left.

That man crawled up to the refreshment stand that day, but he wasn't there to drink; he was there to criticize. Why are you here today? God has drawn you here; are you here to drink? For generations people have come to church for various reasons. Some because they have to; their parents make them, or they feel guilty if they do not come. Some so that the Elders and Pastor leave them alone. Some because it's their duty to come; it's an obligation, a rule to follow. But then there have always been those who have come because they desired to drink of the water of life.

Why are you here? Has your life been free of sin? Has your heart been free of troubles? Have you been crawling, not through a dry, hot desert, but through a lush, tropical garden? Have you no problems, no concerns, no guilt? Have you no sins to confess, no burdens to unload? Then why would you come here to drink? If all is well in your life, then you do not need what God gives here.

If Satan has been leaving you alone, if the sinful world and your own flesh do not ever tempt you, then you have little use for Jesus.

But if you are a man, a woman, a child who has been crawling in and out of problems; if life has been wearing on you; if you, like me, are a sinner who stands condemned, guilty as charged by the accusing Law of God; if your soul is parched and you need relief, then crawl no further. Jesus is here now for you. He pours into your ears His waters that give life. "I am coming soon," He says. The day is fast approaching when Jesus will take you out of this vale of tears. The day is coming when you will behold your Savior face-to-face; when sin, and sorrow, and temptation, and death will be gone forever. "I am coming soon," He promises.

But until then, Jesus comes to you now in holy water, holy words, holy food to strengthen you, to keep you as His own, to assure you that you, dear sinner, are forgiven. And that's why God draws you here...to forgive you. To put His gifts of grace into your open hands of faith. To give you real hope.

A number of years after the evangelist confronted the man who desired to argue with him, he came back to that Midwestern city to preach at another service. After the service that same man again came up to him, but his attitude was different. "I just want you to know," he said, "that what you told me years ago hit me very hard. I could not shake your words from my mind. I went to see a pastor at a church in the area and...well, today I am a member of that church. I am a Christian. Thank you for what you said."

What changed that man? God did. The first time he did not understand his thirst. He crawled up to the place of refreshment, but he refused to drink. But God changed him. He showed him his unquenchable thirst. His accusing Law drove him to the living waters of Christ Jesus. And isn't that true also for you? If you're not thirsty, I cannot make you thirsty. If you do not desire Christ, or if you desire Him only once in a while, I cannot make you desire Him more or at all. But God can. He shows you that what your eternal soul thirsts for is nothing but the words and Sacraments of Jesus. He shows you that crawling across the desert of life is no place for His Christian people, no place for you. Here is the refreshment stand. Here is the oasis. Here in Jesus is where He leads you. Here is where He satisfies you with the true waters of life.

Whether you are here for the first time, or for the 4,000th time, you are welcome here. This is your oasis. Jesus is here for you. And you are, no matter who you are, forgiven of all your sins. Crawl no further. The same Jesus who is coming soon, is here now for you. Amen.