

“What Product is Second in U.S. Beverage Sales?”

John 19:28-30

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It is number two in beverage sales in the United States with annual sales of nine billion dollars. Over the last twenty years, sales have grown by 800%. If the growth rate continues at the current pace, analysts predict that the sale of bottled water will exceed soft drinks by the year 2010.

Why is this occurring? Marketers have convinced a large portion of the population that not all water is created equal and bottled water is purer. Obviously, many believe them, and since the profit margin on bottled water is twenty-five to thirty percent, bottlers could not be happier.

This morning, we turn our attention toward thirst, not ours but Jesus'. One of the sayings of Jesus while on the cross focused upon his need for something to drink when he said, "I thirst."

Can you imagine the delight of the Pharisees when Jesus uttered these simple words? Surely they had been waiting all day for him to complain about something. How appropriate for him to acknowledge thirst. How satisfying those words must have sounded to them, especially in light of what he told the woman at the well about his ability to give her water that would quench her thirst forever or what he told the crowd of thousands that heard him declare that whoever believed in him would never be thirsty.

Jesus had to know his admission of thirst would bring his tormentors great joy and justify their actions. So why did he do it? He had gone through the mockery of a trial and endured a beating without admitting any kind of need, so why now, just moments away from dying?

And why did John include this as one of the three sayings of Jesus on the cross? Why not replace this one with his prayer of forgiveness for his tormentors, the conversation with the repentant thief, the question of God's absence or the parting words of hope? Why "I thirst?"

What did John want us to know about Jesus and what did Jesus want us to know about discipleship? Let me begin the discussion this morning.

I think John wanted his readers to know that Jesus was human. How long had he been without water? It could have been twelve, maybe fifteen hours. I doubt that he had anything to drink since the meal with his disciples in the upper room on Thursday evening. It was now Friday afternoon. Certainly he was thirsty. Anybody would have been and that's John's point, I believe.

He wanted his readers to know that Jesus was really human and really hurt. As Barbara Brown Taylor has written, "Jesus was not pretending while he was hanging there." He experienced everything that anyone else would have on that fateful day, including thirst. Furthermore, this intense thirst under severe circumstances did to the inside of his body what the soldiers did to the outside. His whole body was crying out for relief from his intolerable sufferings and no amount of speculation could eliminate this reality.

By the time John penned his gospel, it appears that Gnostics were trying to convince people that Jesus was not human as we are but rather was a "spiritual phantom." They scoffed at John's declaration that "The word became flesh and dwelt among us." As a result, they believed he endured the crucifixion without pain. According to John, nothing could have been farther from the truth. This was why he described a human and honest Jesus, for which I am glad. I can identify with this Jesus and pray to him. Through him, I find the courage to acknowledge my own challenges and struggles.

If you were as honest as Jesus today, what words would you substitute for "I thirst?" I grieve. I hurt. I ache. I am confused. I am restless. I am disappointed. I am depressed. I am tired. I am worried. I am broke. I am lonely. I am scared. I am frustrated.

Go ahead and say them. Acknowledge what is going on around and inside you. Be human and be honest. Then open your life to the help that others and God will offer. As surely as someone offered Jesus what was available for his parched lips, someone will offer to help you. Let them.

This leads to the second question. What did Jesus want us to know about discipleship? **I think he wanted us to know that discipleship consists of being sensitive to needs and responding to them.**

I hope I am not making too much of Jesus' vulnerability, but I think Jesus' admission of thirst was deliberate. As much as he needed something to relieve his intolerable suffering, he also needed to teach his followers one last lesson before he died. And what was that? Discipleship consists of hearing pleas for help and responding to them.

In Matthew's gospel, one of the last stories that Jesus told prior to his arrest focused upon generous and selfish servants. One group was sensitive to and met the needs of the hungry, thirsty, naked, lonely and imprisoned. The other group ignored them. Upon receiving their reward or punishment, the king said, "Whatever you did or did not do for the least of these, you did or did not do for me." The king made it personal, didn't he? Helping someone in need, even a stranger was the equivalent of aiding him.

"I thirst," Jesus said while on the cross, and some kind soul responded by giving him what was available. I think he is still thirsty. As long as anyone in this world is thirsty, so is he. As long as anyone suffers, he will feel their pain. Furthermore, he will be their advocate and voice their plea for help, just as he verbalized his own.

Are you listening? Can you hear him? Will you see what you have available and use it to meet that need? Will you be generous and sacrificial? Will you pick up that hyssop this time and use it to relieve someone's pain? I hope so.

Last week, Reggie McNeal, author of The Present Future, challenged us to be more aware of others' needs. One place he practices this is at restaurants since he travels and eats out a lot. He tells his server that he is going to pray before he eats and asks him if there is something he would like for him to include in the prayer. Only once has he been told no. Each time the server has paused and given him one or more prayer requests. Often he has been told by servers how much this simple act of kindness meant to them.

I think this is what it means to be a disciple. You carry a hyssop wherever you go ready to touch someone's parched lips and in so doing, satisfy your own thirst.