

Kirk of St. James - March 1, 2026
Sermon: “Flooded” by Chad Bolton
John 7:11-13; 25-52

I would like to begin with a simple image that will serve as a metaphor for our time this morning. Imagine someone standing in their kitchen late at night. They are thirsty—not desperately so, but with that persistent dryness that refuses to go away. They turn on the faucet, cup their hands, and drink. The water, however, tastes flat and metallic. It is technically water, but it does not refresh. So they drink again, and again, and again. Yet the thirst remains. Eventually they realize that although they are drinking constantly, they are not being nourished. They are consuming something that looks like water but does not behave like water. It wets the mouth but does not reach the places where real thirst lives.

This metaphor provides a helpful entry point into the world of John 7. The setting is the Festival of Tabernacles, or the Festival of Booths in some translations, and was one of the most vibrant and crowded celebrations in the Jewish calendar. It was an eight-day event and all adult males in a fifteen-mile radius of Jerusalem were required to attend, although many more voluntarily came. It received its name from all attendees setting up little “booths” made of branches and fronds to live in. The roof of each structure was mandated to be thatched but the thatching had to be wide enough so that the stars could be seen at night when one looked up in their temporary shelter. Like many of the Jewish festivals, it was meant to primarily serve as a reminder of their ancestors’ homeless wandering in the desert without a roof over their heads when they fled Egypt so many generations before.

The rituals of the festival are elaborate. The atmosphere is charged. And in the midst of this festival, Jesus becomes the subject of intense public discussion. John tells us:

- “There was much muttering about him among the people.”
- “Some said, ‘He is a good man.’”
- “Others said, ‘No, he deceives the people.’”
- More questioned: “Isn’t this the guy they’re trying to kill?”
- Still, more said, “He isn’t the Messiah; we know where this man comes from and scripture says we won’t know where the Messiah comes from,” and “Pretty sure the real Messiah is supposed to do more miracles than this guy.”
- Others were sure he was going to be a great teacher of the Greeks.
- At one point even, although we didn’t read it this morning, some ask if Jesus is demon-possessed.

Do you get a sense of the chaos and confusion? Everyone has a hot take. Everyone has an opinion. Everyone is talking. The dominant feature of the scene is noise - opinions, speculation, and debate.

What is striking is that Jesus himself is not being encountered. He is being analyzed. He is being categorized. He is being discussed. But he is not being heard. In this environment, Jesus becomes a

topic rather than a presence. He becomes content rather than revelation. The sheer volume of talk obscures the possibility of truth actually appearing. The people are not engaging with Jesus; they are engaging with each other about Jesus. They are not listening for the voice of God; they are listening for the voices of the crowd.

During the festival, a special ceremony was carried out. People would come to the temple with their palms and willows and they'd form a kind of screened roof and march, while a priest would take a golden pitcher, go to the nearby pool, fill the pitcher and return to the temple and then pour out the water as an offering while people waved their branches towards the altar. On the final of the festival, this ceremony took on even more significance as they would march seven times around the altar and it's here on this last day, during this water pouring ceremony that Jesus stands and cries out, "If anyone thirsts, let them come to me and drink."

This moment is the theological center of the passage. Jesus offers living water. He offers not content but communion. He offers not noise but the Spirit. He offers not analysis but transformation. He offers not speculation but revelation.

The last few times I've preached, I've drawn on the work of one of my favorite contemporary philosophers, Byung-Chul Han, and today is no exception. His work provides a striking parallel to the dynamics of John 7. Han argues that today we live in what he calls an *infocracy* - a society governed by the flow of information. He believes the digitization of information especially has become the prominent threat to democracy, or democratic freedom. In this society, he says, information is abundant, rapid, shallow, and weaponized, especial on the digital platform. Social bots – automated accounts on social media that pretend to be real people – post, tweet, and share; they disseminate fake news and information and hate-filled comments. They create an information war. Information today produces noise rather than meaning. It overwhelms our capacity for discernment. It erodes the silence necessary for truth to appear. It fragments community and exhausts the self.

Han's analysis is not primarily moralistic; it is diagnostic. He is not saying that information is bad. He is saying that information, by its very nature, cannot give us what only truth can give. Information circulates, but it does not transform. It stimulates, but it does not satisfy. It fills the mind, but it does not nourish the soul. Han summarizes our condition succinctly: we are drowning in information but starving for truth.

And I don't want to be anachronistic, but John 7 captures something essential about the age in which we now live. Much like the crowd in John 7, we know what it is like to live in a world where the sheer volume of voices makes it difficult to discern what is true. We know what it is like to be surrounded by commentary but deprived of clarity. We know what it is like to be inundated with information but starved for wisdom. The world of John 7 is not as distant from our own as it might initially appear. We are consuming information constantly—news, posts, commentary, arguments, analysis. We take in

more data in a single day than most people in history encountered in a lifetime. And yet, despite this constant intake, we do not feel refreshed. We do not feel grounded. We do not feel at peace. Honestly, when was the last time you scrolled through your socials feed and came away feeling good? We are drinking endlessly, but our thirst remains. The flow is constant, but the nourishment is absent. We are flooded by content, but we are starved for meaning.

Han often uses the metaphor of navigation to describe our informational condition. In a society of *infocracy* he argues that we have more “maps” than ever—more data, more directions, more commentary - but **less orientation**. We know where everything is, but not where *we* are.

Whenever Amanda and I travel together, I am always in charge of getting us from Point A to Point B – (you didn’t hear it from me, but Amanda is terrible with directions). And the question I am asked most by my wife when we travel together is, “Do you know where we are?” (Okay, maybe that’s the second question, the first being “Are we lost?”)

But that question: *Do you know where you are?* ...

A family is driving in a city they don’t know. They are trying to find their destination. The GPS keeps recalculating. “Turn left.” “Make a U-turn.” “Proceed to the route.” The screen is full of information - maps, icons, traffic alerts, tolls - but the more instructions it gives, the more lost they feel. In a cruel paradox, they are drowning in directions but have no sense of direction.

Eventually they pull over, turn off the GPS, step outside, and ask a local for help. The person points: “You’re actually very close. Just walk straight until you see the river. Once you’re at the river, you’ll know where you are.”

This is Han’s point: **information is not orientation**. And this metaphor overlays beautifully onto John 7: the crowds have endless “maps” about Jesus—opinions, arguments, interpretations—but no orientation. Jesus’ invitation (“Come to me and drink”) is the equivalent of stepping out of the car and asking someone who actually *knows* the terrain.

When we return to John 7 with Han’s analysis in mind, the festival scene becomes even more vivid. The crowd’s endless talk, their quick judgments, their suspicion, their reliance on surface-level analysis—all of this resembles the dynamics Han identifies in our own age. The people at the festival are drinking constantly from the well of religious and political discourse, but none of it satisfies. None of it leads to understanding. None of it leads to communion. They are experiencing precisely what Han describes: an abundance of information and a scarcity of truth. They are drinking constantly, but they are not being refreshed.

Against this backdrop, Jesus’ invitation takes on even greater significance. “If anyone thirsts, let them come to me and drink.” Jesus offers living water. In this light, Jesus is not simply another voice in the

informational marketplace. He is the presence of God in the midst of human noise. He is the source of living water. He is the one who restores the possibility of truth in a world overwhelmed by information.

And yet even after this declaration, how do the people in the crowd react?:

- “Some of the crowd said, “This is really the prophet.”
- Others said, “No, I’m pretty sure he’s the Messiah.”
- Scriptural authorities said, “No, no, scriptures say the Messiah has to come from Bethlehem, but I think this guy is from Galilee.”
- Some wanted to arrest him for lying.
- The temple police and the Pharisees fight amongst themselves about how Jesus speaks.
- And from this a debate about legal proceedings occurs.
- And Jesus is once again lost in the noise of opinions and information.

This brings us to the pastoral question at the heart of the passage: What are we drinking? What sources are shaping our inner life? What noise is forming our imagination? What information is exhausting us? It is entirely possible to drink constantly from the flood of information and never be refreshed. It is possible to be full of data and empty of peace. It is possible to be surrounded by voices and yet unable to hear the voice of God.

Jesus’ invitation remains as direct and gracious as ever: “If anyone thirsts, let them come to me and drink.” And that’s not an invitation for those who have mastered the right opinions or won the right arguments. It is simply for those who thirst. For those who are tired of noise. For those who long for truth. For those who desire communion rather than content. For those who are weary of drinking without being refreshed.

And so the invitation stands: come to Jesus, and drink. Come to the One who does not overwhelm you with information but fills you with living water. Come to the One who does not fragment you but makes rivers of life flow from within you. Come to the One who does not drown you in noise but restores your soul. Come to the One who does not offer content but communion. Come to the One who does not offer analysis but presence. Come to the One who does not offer speculation but truth.

“If anyone thirsts,” Jesus says, “let them come to me and drink.” May we hear that invitation. May we respond to it. And may we find in him the living water our souls have been longing for.

Amen.