

**Sermon for
The Feast of Sukkot (Tabernacles)
The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

Date: October 20, 2019

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Leviticus 23:33–43

Epistle Reading: James 3:13–4:10

Gospel Reading: John 7:37–44

Sermon Text: Leviticus 23:33–43

Sermon Title: The Feast of Sukkot (Tabernacles)



Introit: Psalm 37:5-7; Antiphon: Psalm 37:4

Hymns:

LSB 895 – Now Thank We All Our God

Bringing in the Sheaves

LSB 781 – We Give Thee but Thine Own (v. 1-2)

LSB 955 – Let the Vineyards Be Fruitful

LSB 892 – Come, Ye Thankful People, Come

Distribution:

LSB 893 – Sing to the Lord of Harvest

LSB 894 – For the Fruits of His Creation

Liturgy:

Divine Service IV p. 203



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Text: Leviticus 23:33–43

The Lord spoke to Moses, “Tell the Israelites: The fifteenth day of this seventh month is the Festival of Booths to the Lord. It will last seven days. On the first day there will be a holy assembly. Do not do any regular work. For seven consecutive days bring a food offering to the Lord. On the eighth day there will be a holy assembly. Bring the Lord a food offering. This is the last festival of the year. Do not do any regular work.

These are the Lord’s appointed festivals. Announce them as holy assemblies for bringing to the Lord food offerings, burnt offerings, grain offerings, other sacrifices, and wine offerings—each one on its special day. These offerings are in addition to those for the Lord’s holy days of rest, as well as your gifts, all your vows, and your freewill offerings to the Lord.

On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered what the land produces, celebrate the Lord’s festival for seven days. The first and the eighth days will be worship festivals. On the first day take the best fruits, palm branches, the branches of leafy trees and poplars, and celebrate in the presence of the Lord your God for seven days. It is the Lord’s festival. Celebrate it for seven days each year. This is a permanent law for generations to come. Celebrate this festival in the seventh month. Live in booths for seven days. Every native-born in Israel must live in booths so that generations to come may learn how I made the people of Israel live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.”

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Grace to you, and peace, in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

We are continuing our trek through the ancient feasts of the Old Testament. We are exploring what these feasts were meant to teach the people then, as well as what they still teach us today. We've talked about Rosh HaShannah (Head of the Year). Then there are the ten Yamim Noraim (Days of Repentance). The tenth day being Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). After the High Holy Days and the revelry of breaking the fast, there is yet another feast. It is only five days after Yom Kippur. It would seem that God wanted His people to spend the whole month at the Temple.

Today we'll look at the Feast of Sukkot, or the Feast of Tabernacles. It is an eight-day festival that begins on the 15th day of the seventh month of Tishre. God said, "this is a permanent law for generations to come."¹ God commanded a sacred assembly, and no regular work was to be done. In the Book of Numbers, God outlines specifically the amount and type of offerings to be made on this day and throughout the next seven days.² Another sacred assembly follows at the end of the week, Hoshannah Rabah, the Great Hosanna.³

The Feast of Sukkot is a harvest festival. It is no surprise that God ordained three major festivals within 15 days of each other during the Fall harvest. Harvest time was, and still is, a busy season for farmers. It was easy to become preoccupied with responsibilities and feel as if it were necessary to work seven days each week to bring in the crop. Work could interfere with family, worship, and relationships with God. It was easy to lose focus and believe that the success of work depended on oneself and one's own labor. After all if one didn't work hard how would he support himself and his family? One might even reason that hard work is the sacrifice made to provide for the family. Don't we often still think that way.

God will have none of that. He takes every opportunity to remind us that He is the provider. He reminds us that He is the Lord. He brought His covenant people out of the land of Egypt. He parted the Red Sea to deliver His people from the hand of Pharaoh. He provided water from the rock and Manna in the wilderness. He gave His people a covenant by which they should live until the day He would provide a Redeemer to relieve suffering, provide comfort from distress, and bring His people home to Him. For most of their wilderness journey survival required only that they thank and praise God. It is this time that is remembered at the Feast of Sukkot. Holy Scripture records:

1 Leviticus 23:41

2 Leviticus 23:36; Numbers 29:12-40

3 'Hosanna' is a Hebrew word that means 'Save us Lord.'

On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars and rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days... Live in booths for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in booths so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.⁴

So was born the ‘Sukkah.’ The Sukkah is a temporary dwelling built by a Jewish family in yards, on rooftops, or even indoors. Sukkah means booth, hut, tent, or tabernacle. The booth is designed as a reminder of Israel’s migration from Egypt to the Promised Land. The Feast of Sukkot then, celebrates the historic event of the wandering and also expresses gratitude for God’s provision.

The ceiling of the Sukkah is made of palm fronds spread sparsely enough to let those inside still see through to the sky. It symbolizes God’s protection over those who seek Him. It is not a ceiling of man’s design that provides our protection from the world, but a ceiling of God’s design. The Sukkah is built from branches. Nehemiah directed the people to gather “branches from olive and wild olive trees, and from myrtles, palms and shade trees.”⁵ The people were to live in these booths for seven days to remember those who lived in temporary dwellings during the wandering. Today while some Jewish people may build a Sukkah rarely does anyone actually live in it for a week, though some may eat a meal there. It does however stand in the presence of the people as a reminder.

Rabbis have given the elements, used to build the Sukkah, their own interpretation. The “choice fruit” that God commands is called *etrog* and is a heart-shaped citrus fruit. Often those who build a Sukkah will hang citrus fruit from its boughs. The *etrog* symbolizes the best fruit of the land and is evidence of God’s abundant provision. Rabbis also teach that the *etrog* stands for a kind heart that belongs to God.

Second, *lulav* or palm branches. these represent the agricultural aspect of the feast. The palm branches also represent the spinal cord, a symbol of courage and steadfastness. *Hadas*, or myrtle, is the third element and represents the human eye because of the eye-shaped leaves of the myrtle. With such an eye, the Jew can see the good in man and shun the sin of envy. Finally, *aravah*, or the willow branches, are used to represent the mouth, to teach right thinking and straight speaking. Rabbis teach that the Sukkah is a picture of the Jew, a wanderer who exhibits

4 Leviticus 23:40, 42–43

5 Nehemiah 8:15

kindness, courage, freedom from envy, and cleanness of speech. Binding together each of these elements, Jews weave the *lulav* (palm branches) in all directions as a reminder that God's protection and provision surround them.

If the Sukkah is a picture of a righteous Jew then truly there is only one Jew it can ultimately represent. In the Psalms we are often reminded that there is no one living who is righteous before God.⁶ Yet God Himself became a man, a Jew who walked the dusty roads of the Promised Land. Y'shua, (Jesus) is the only One who exhibits true kindness and courage. Only He is free from sin, and full of right thinking and straight speaking. He came to us to teach. He chose the Feast of Tabernacles to teach us about Himself.

Jesus' brothers had asked Him to attend this feast with them in Jerusalem.⁷ They were skeptics and wanted Jesus to prove, in public, the things they had heard about Him. Jesus declined to go with them but later He went, in secret, because He had to go to the feast to fulfill all that God had commanded. Jesus listened to the crowd to hear what they said about Him. Halfway through the festival Jesus began to teach, but His words were not understood. His teaching was not received. Then, on Hoshana Rabah (The Great Hosanna⁸), the eighth day of the festival, He used another of the traditions of His people to make His meaning clear.

On the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles the priests at the Temple poured out water from a large urn into a basin. The water was to represent God's Spirit and was a prayer that God would send rain to the earth, and that next year's harvest would be plentiful. (This tradition continues today as Jewish congregations gather on Hoshana Rabah and pour water onto a dry and thirsty ground.) To us the water represents God's Spirit poured out on a dry and thirsty people. It brings life, just as Jesus proclaimed loudly in the Gospel reading, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."⁹

Suddenly, it is clear. The pouring out of the water, the representation of God's Spirit, the references to Isaiah's prophecies of Messiah, and the time in the wilderness all come together in one astonishing claim by this man. The rock that God used to bring forth water to quench the thirst of a weary and grumbling nation was standing before them as the Rock that the builder's rejected.¹⁰ Yet for those who would believe, the Spirit of God would indeed flow from within them,¹¹

6 Psalm 143:2

7 John 7:1-10

8 'Hosanna' is a Hebrew word that means 'Save us Lord.'

9 John 7:37-38

10 Psalm 118:22; Matthew 21:42

11 John 7:38-39

pouring out life to those who share in that water, refreshing them in their weariness and removing any need for grumbling.

However, before this water could flow another stream must flow. It has only been two weeks since Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement.) The dust and blood from the sacrifice still cling to the soles of those who walk the path, but those sacrifices were not sufficient. Those sacrifices were never enough to account for all sin. Another sacrifice must be made. Jesus is that final one time perfect sacrifice for all sin. He knows that for water (the symbol of God's Holy Spirit in the Old Testament) to flow from within us it must flow from Him first. So Jesus pours Himself out for us.¹²

Look in your Bibles at Psalm 22, and look at verse 1. What do you read there? "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?!" Jesus is quoting Psalm 22. Remember that these Psalm are the hymn book of Old Testament Israel. These are the hymns and songs they sang in every worship service. The people are illiterate. They cannot read, so they have had to memorize all 150 hymns. They knew them by heart. So when Jesus quotes from the hymn, they will recognize it.

...but maybe that was just coincidence. What are the next words Jesus says from the cross. "I thirst."¹³ Look down through Psalm 22 until you get to verses 14 and 15. What do we read there?

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax. It has melted within me. My strength is dried up like pieces of broken pottery. My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. You lay me down in the dust of death.

Psalm 22 describes a man who is dying from torture and thirst. He is being "poured out like water," for us. Thirsty Himself, He drank from a stalk of hyssop, gave up His own Spirit, and died.¹⁴ As a spear pierced His side, a stream of water flowed from His body.¹⁵ Water poured out like the water poured at Hoshana Rabah at the end of the Feast of Tabernacles. Water that would quench the fires of Hell for all who believe.

Now scan through the rest of Psalm 22 until you get to the end. What are the last words you read there?

12 Psalm 22:14

13 John 19:28

14 John 19:30b

15 John 19:34

There will be descendants who serve him, a generation that will be told about the Lord. They will tell people, yet to be born, about his righteousness— that he has finished it.

What are Jesus' next words? "It is finished." Jesus quotes Psalm 22 from the cross, not to lament His own place and suffering, but to teach the people. To teach us He is Yeshua Ha-Mashiach, Jesus the Messiah. He has come to be that one time perfect sacrifice, without blemish or spot. He is the final atonement for all sin. It is not the blood of beasts that covers the ground, it is His blood. It is not the water of Hoshana Rabah that is poured out, but water that flowed from His pierced side, as He pours out the Holy Spirit on all of us,¹⁶ now through the waters of Holy Baptism.

Can you see how amazingly intricate the tapestry of God's Holy Word really is? Moses records that shortly after creation Adam and Eve sinned, and a Savior was promised¹⁷ who would make all things new.¹⁸ Somewhere in the neighborhood of about 2,000 years later God commands His people to celebrate the Harvest Festival Season where the traditions and rites are all pointing to the Messiah. About 600 years later King David, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, writes Psalm 22. Another 650 years pass and Jesus is fulfilling every word of Holy Writ. Words written over thousands of years, by many different authors, and all of it fits together so perfectly, so miraculously. Only God could have done such a thing. If you can truly grasp the wonder, it must bring you to a place of awe when pondering the magnificence of our God.

Looking now specifically at the Feast of Booths again and the end of the Harvest Festival season. Just as the booths are temporary, Jesus' physical life on Earth was only temporary. He was destined to die for our sins, and for this purpose God became a man. His time in the tomb was also only temporary. He was destined to rise from that tomb to go to His own home and prepare an eternal place for us.¹⁹ The Sukkah built during this Feast of Tabernacles is a temporary dwelling but through its sparsely thatched roof one can see the stars in the heavens as we gaze toward our eternal home. The Feast of Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles) should remind us still today our song should be:

All I know is I'm not home yet
This is not where I belong

16 Acts 2:33

17 Genesis 3:15

18 Revelation 21:5

19 John 14:3

Take this world and give me Jesus
This is not where I belong.²⁰

Our faith is in Him who builds us a permanent home on the rock^{21,22}. It is for this reason, and this reason alone, that we give our thanks and praise to a Holy God, in Jesus' name.

Amen.

20 "Where I Belong lyrics" Building 429, © Essential Music Publishing, Spirit Music Group

21 Matthew 7:24-27

22 Matthew 16:18