

July 19, 2020

**“Following the River”
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake**

Scripture Readings:

1 Corinthians 12:13 (NRSV)

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though any, are one body, so it is with Christ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

John 7:37-38 (NRSV)

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As[a] the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart[b] shall flow rivers of living water.’”

So here we are again this morning with two scriptures on water. This isn’t surprising because water is a scarce and vital commodity in Jesus’ time and location. Water is mentioned a total of 722 times in the Bible. It is what you would call an Archetype in our sacred text. An overarching theme that helps us to understand the very nature of God.

The people Jesus was talking to understood what thirst was and could relate to what it is like to need something with all that you are and to have that need satisfied. Jesus is telling us that needing God and letting God quench your spiritual thirst is just as important to our survival as water, the thing that we are most dependent on in our existence.

Though most of us have never been life threateningly thirsty we can relate to that spiritual image of being thirsty for healing from God when we are hurting deeply, grieving, struggling, empty or just lonesome. Letting God into that pain can feel like an in rushing of water like when a damn is opened up.

We also know that feeling of joy when it feels like we are spilling up and over with the blessings of God: content and satisfied to our very core with our life and the love in it.

But what I found so interesting about these two scriptures when we lay them beside one another is this. The first one, like many of the biblical texts, is one where we are thirsty and we get our spiritual thirst quenched by God. But the second one is about that living water coming out of us. Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’

So a life lived in the spirit of God is not just about us. It is not just about us getting what we need but it is also about us giving the world what it needs too. As people of God we get to participate in this great cycle of God's spirit, allowing it to flood our souls and then letting it flow like a river out of ourselves to find and fill the crevices and cracks and corners of our broken world.

So much of being human is about these cycles. The breathing in of air, the breathing out of air, the rush of blood into our heart, the rush of blood out of our heart. We are participants in every moment of these beautiful cycles of life. When we let ourselves follow the rivers literally, we follow it down to the ocean or lake where it then evaporates, then rains down on our earth and then back into the rivers. Nothing is ever lost.

This is why water became such an important part of our faith. Water is used to wash away all the burdens of this world giving us that feeling of rebirth, and renewal. When a child is baptized it is a new beginning, for an adult it is a reminder that each day is a new beginning and a new chance to be a positive force, a living river in the lives of the people around us.

Like the Colorado river shaped the Grand Canyon we can shape the lives of those we encounter. May we all be living rivers of God's love, drinking deep of the spirit of the living God and letting it flow out of us, flood our banks and give life to everyone we meet. AMEN

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