

Sermon: Proper 6A

Title: It's a River, Not a Pie

Author: The Rt. Rev. Shay Craig

All rivers flow to the sea.

All water seeks the lowest point - which is an ocean basin

Whether it comes from Mount Everest

Or an underground stream in the Mojave

gravity pulls water down toward the core of the Earth.

Earth's surface is underlain by bedrock, through which water cannot flow.

The result is a marvelous maze

Of rivers and stream beds

Of landlocked lakes and islands and continents

Think about how the earth looks from space

All those land masses

and all the beautiful waves and lines across them

Are made

By rivers.

This is not just physics

Its theology

Like an underground stream

This morning's reading from Genesis and from Matthew

Flow from the same source

Toward the same destination.

In our Hebrew Bible reading

Abraham and Sarah are visited

By three visitors.

They go out of their way to make the visitors welcome

Preparing food,
offering exceptional hospitality
and kindness.

In the course of the visit
The guests make a prediction
that the long held hope of this couple
Will come to be.
Despite the odds.

Now, the scripture says
that the visitors made the prediction
The scripture says
that the Lord replied to Abraham's surprise
The Scripture says
that the Lord visited Abraham.
It does NOT say that the visitors WERE the Lord.

The Lord was with them before the visitors came
The Lord was always with them, always will be with them.
The ever present Lord APPEARED to Abraham and Sarah
But the Lord was always there....

So if this is not a story about a visit from the Lord
What is it?
Its the story of a river.

Have you ever felt the presence of God in or around you?
Felt that God inhabited a place
or a moment in your life?

In these moments we feel an instinctual, intuitive
Sense of safety and well being
We experience a pervasive, tranquil feeling of belonging

I think we have all felt it at one time or another

When we know that God's love inhabits us.

But that is never where it ends.

God's love, grace, blessing

Choose your word

Is not stagnant.

It is a river that flowed INTO us from God

And is meant to flow out FROM us

In the case of Abraham and Sarah

It flows into the visitors

And these visitors will take that love on their journey

And the river will keep winding its way through the land.

That river bubbles up again

In our Gospel reading.

The followers of Jesus have spent months and years

Welling up the love and grace of the Holy One.

They are filled with the Spirit

They are ready to be sent out.

And Jesus tells them not to hoard their gifts

He tells them "go and do these things"

All the love that I have given you

You can give away

The land is parched

Become a fountain of living water!

Sadly, we are not very good at this.

At sharing the unconditional love of God

That has been given to us.

And I have a theory about why that is.

Its because in our heart of hearts

We think of kindness as a commodity.

We have a store of kindness
and we spend it down and then we are out.

We become exhausted.
We decide not to try.
I myself am THE WORST about this
I hear myself say, "I don't have the bandwidth"
That's a cool, self-aggrandizing way of saying
"I choose not to be kind to you.
Because I think it will wear me out."

But the truth is
And we know this, we just forget it
Being kind
Does not wear us out
It fills us up.

Because kindness is a river, not a pie.
It flows through us from an unlimited source.
The grace and kindness of God
Is a closed system
It never goes away, it never lessens
It flows in and around and through us all.
The grace and love of God is a river
Flowing into us
That is that wonderful sense of completeness
I just described.

The trouble comes when we dam it up
When we stop it in our own hearts and lives
And withhold it from others.

This is not just theology, its physics

IN 1964, The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

blocked about 40% of the Mississippi River's peak flow to the Gulf at Morgan City, LA.

The delayed consequences today are unnatural floods on the Lower Mississippi.

Four of the five highest floods ever have happened since 2008 all higher than the Great Flood of 1927.

When we back up the flow
We cause damage.

Everyone of us has people in our lives
Toward which it is difficult to show grace.
And if we pay attention to ourselves in that moment
We can almost feel the pressure, the holding back.

But that's a deeply human thought
Because kindness, grace, the love of God
Is a river
Not a pie
If we give it away, we don't have less.
We will be replenished.

Now, I know this is a tall order
To be asked to open our hearts to people
When we are exhausted, or frustrated or tired.
And I'll tell you this over and over
I never want to give you another thing
to add to your ToDo list

This is not a "fix this this week."
This is an aspect of the human condition
That we will all always struggle with
And never achieve perfection.

Jesus says when we do it that we should say
"The kingdom has come near"

Not "BOOM, I got this" mic drop.
Just "near"

Learning to be instruments of God's peace is a lifetime journey
We are not the first or the last to struggle with it.

Earlier in the book of Genesis
The first sons of Adam and Eve - Cain and Abel
Both made offerings of their work to the Lord
And the Lord preferred one over the other.

Cain perceived that the Lord loved Able
And Cain believed that if God loved Able
He must love Cain less.

For Cain, love was a pie
His brother's piece was large so his piece must be smaller.

And Cain killed Abel.

You would think at this point God would no longer love Cain
But God's love is a river

That flows forever

There are consequences for Cains actions -
he is banished

But before he goes

The Lord places on him a blessing
A mark of protection

Even in the face of profound failure
God's love is a river that flows into God's children

So it's hard to love the hard-to-love
And we will fail.

But we mustn't give up.
That is the one thing we must not do

Because if we can
 When we can
 Let the love of God flow through us ...
When we believe with our deepest selves
 That love is a river, not a pie
Then we, with our lives
 Proclaim
That the Kingdom has come near.

All rivers flow to the sea
 They shape the land
 They form the earth
 They make possible all the life on this planet
 Even we are 60% water.

Our very lives depend
On the free flow of these waters
 From Mount Everest to the Marianas Trench
 We rely on the flow
 To give us life.

That is not just physics.
It's God's truth.