

## River Water

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Psalm 46 “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,” the Psalmist sings and the title of the movie “The River Runs Through It” (with Robert Redford) recalls that river, the river that runs through the heavenly city in the Book of Revelation: “the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing through the City of God.”

Just think of how hot and dry this past summer was! The river was silent; it had no voice; the streams did not chuckle or leap-frog over rocks; no children splashed in puddles. At home, I did my rain dance, obsessively, to no avail, and fretted that the well would run dry down at the barn. Our new sod sizzled and fried and died in the heat, and we ran with sweat in our summer clothes whenever we ventured out of door. Whew! No river to make us glad.

But “there IS a river whose streams make glad the City of God.” And that river is the sign of a vibrant ecosystem, just as it is, once again, after the beneficent fall rains, here in Northwest Connecticut. The confluence of the three rivers in Woodbury -- the Pomperaug, the Nonnewaug and the Weepeekeemee—is full and swollen; the Bend in the River at Southbury Audubon is sleek and silver with fish. We celebrate rivers’ presence in our lives by naming them, giving them a personality. Without rivers, there is no dense and fertile soil, no corn grows, the trout cease jumping, the blue heron seeks in vain for minnows.

This summer, when the rivers were virtually dried-up, I went down to Three Rivers Park in Woodbury and stood on the banks of what had been river water and there was nothing, nothing but stones and dirt and a few dead fish. All life was gone; there was only the stench of sadness.

But after the rains finally came, on my next visit, I saw those same dead rocks drenched beneath dancing water, and they were turned into jewels – vibrant colors reflecting sunlight off the water, smooth stones tumbling together in clinks and clamor, bright flashed of fish nosing out from around their shady shelter. Just so are WE transformed – our arid, dusty selves given color and light again in the bath of river water, the wash of the Holy Spirit blessing us and making even our most devastated, stony, river bottom selves beautiful and bright.

As the father in the film “A River Runs Through It” said to his son,

“All good things, Trout and salvation, Come by Grace.”

“There IS a river whose streams make glad the City of God.”

A river is an ecosystem, and it feeds and fuels, enriches and washes everything around it. In the Celestial City, the river is circulation – constant movement and flowing, change in its current and

sameness between two banks; the river is the circulatory system of the heavenly city, like the water that flowed from the body of the Crucified Christ when His side was pierced with a spear.

River water is fresh water – keep it clear, and pure, and translucent, and potable, and you have a healthy biosphere and a flourishing spiritual ecosystem, too. Baptisms can happen in rivers; rituals of purification take place there, and also joy and pleasure and recreation: we might fly-fish by day, and skinny-dip by night! The blessing of the water is a resurrection: we are like children again, and cleansed of all our daily dust and mud and unworthiness.

“There is a river whose streams make glad the City of God.” This river runs through our lives, irrigating them, moistening our hard hearts, giving us water for tears, quenching our thirst for knowledge, marvelously making flowers to grow in the dry desert of our human selves: this spiritual river running through us, gladdening our hearts and sustaining our lives.

COMMUNITY is a River – the singer Mary Chapin Carpenter remembers her childhood days when Baptist friends would “gather at the river, under the wide-spreading trees,” renewing their fellowship, dipping their toes into faith;

PRAYER can be a River—we shape our hearts as vessels into which the water of inspiration pour ceaselessly, a well never empty from which we can always drink;

DEATH, too, is a River -- a channel bounded on two sides – one river bank earth, the other heaven: the Pulitzer prize-winning poet Mary Oliver writes,

“When we die, the body breaks open like a river;

The old body goes on, climbing the hill.”

“There is a river whose streams make glad the City of God”

And we are bathed in that river,

Throughout time and through all eternity,

Laved in the unending flow of God’s Love.

Amen.