

7.20.19 - Pastor Jordan Gades Sermon, Revelation 22:1-5, Matthew 28: 1-10

Good Evening! Grace and Peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ Amen.

So I spent a few summers working at a bible camp in western Wisconsin during college. During that time, I got to do the full gambit of camp activities; all the **in camp** stuff, games, bible studies, beach, and amazing worships, **day camps**, always something different, just a heads up every church you go to is incredibly different and can have different traditions which can lead to some very interesting experiences. But for all the different things that I got to do, **being on the river was my favorite**. We took youth down the Namekagon and St Croix rivers every week. There was nothing like it. You got to spend an amazing few days floating peacefully through God's creation, you could really feel how you were a part of this amazing whole that God has blessed us with, every stroke of the paddle almost became a prayer of thanksgiving. During these trips you really got to know the kid that you were with, you spent the whole time together, just the 10 to 14 of us, and you really got to connect with them, to dive deep to have real conversations and teach and challenge their faith. And every day was its own adventure. You got to really choose how you wanted it to be. You could just float and swim, you could push hard to see more miles or just have more time at a campsite, you could stop and play on sandbars or end up shooting some rapids. All of this was possible because of these incredible rivers.

So the Namekagon flows into the St Croix. The St Croix flows into the Mississippi. The Mississippi flows from Itasca and around the estate to not too far from here all the way down to the gulf. So in theory I could jump into a canoe head down the river and up to those old camping spots on the St Croix, or all the way to New Orleans. The rivers of this world connect us in many different ways.

People have always been pulled to rivers. In the middle east there hardly any water right. So where do people live? Basically next to 4 rivers. Nile, Tigris and Euphrates, and the Jordan. These rivers become the source of life. They keep the people alive, they keep the crops and animals alive. They keep soil healthy for future generations to come. They provide a way for people to travel cheaply and easily. They allow for faster communication transfers of ideas. There might not be anything in our lives nowadays that holds that much presence in our lives. We get water from the tap, food from the store. Ideas from the web, and like 1,000 different ways of communicating with just our phones. But we need to combine all of those to even start to realize how vital these rivers were to the people who lived along them.

So there is a lot of good reasons that river of life is associated with coming out of the throne of God, why it feeds those heavenly trees and brings renewed life to all creation. This is the power of God flowing out, spreading and seeking those are low and filling them up. The river is where people find life. And it's this river that connects all people and all creation.

It's good for us to come back to this essential point about God. God is life, God brings life. nothing else. The kingdom of God is defined by life. We know new life because of God forgiveness through the giving of Jesus' life.

It's from this new life that we are bound together as one. We are connected in a different way than the ways that we experience here, out in the parched desert, away from those holy

waters. God flows to us, into us and through us. Making each of us a byway for the Spirit to move through. It's due to this renewed and everlasting connection to our God and each other that we try and bring life to all that we know and meet each day. It's why we love each other and forgive. Why we go the extra mile or 3 steps to let someone know they are loved and that they are never alone. It's why we go through the extra effort to make sure that our lakes and rivers stay clean so that creation may flourish and may show off its inherent beauty. The beauty God put there.

We have this sense that there is something special when we are in the wilderness and find a view of utter striking beauty. That is us connecting with God through God's perfect creation. These things are important to us and our faith. They are important to God. We have to take care of them.

The river of Life is unstoppable. Remember that if you ever get discouraged. Life flowed into the darkest places and did the impossible. And on the third day, death was turned into life. That is how we move in this world. Maybe it's slow and seeping, maybe rushing and roaring but always forward, always toward our goal of rebuilding the kingdom of God. The river of life is always seeking to bring us closer to God and to our brothers and sisters. This idea that God connects everything cannot be overstated.

Isaac Newton had this idea when he started postulating about Gravity. He was a Christian and he was trying to figure out what this force was that drew everything throughout creation together, brought everything together and held it together was. One of his ideas was that it was Jesus. The physical representation of God acting on the universe. God is this physical force that makes life possible. I like that idea a lot.

Today we get to join with the mighty flow of this river of life. And we get to choose how we are joining this amazing adventure. You are already a part of the current, swept up with all creation. Are we going to go slow to be refreshed, push hard to experience as much of the river as possible, or find our own pace to connect to the fullest with the source of life, Jesus Christ our savior? Amen.