

New Scotland Presbyterian Church
Worship for the Season of Creation – River Sunday
(video link at <https://www.newscotlandpc.com/>)
September 27, 2020
The Rev. Holly S. Cameron

Prelude

Ryan Dwyer

“Down to the River to Pray”

Introduction

Welcome to worship at New Scotland Presbyterian Church.

There is one announcement before we start our worship. We have our fall chicken and rib BBQ coming up on Thursday, October 8. The dinner is take-out only, and you can come pick up your dinner here at the church from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. that day. Dinners are \$14 and you can reserve your dinner by going to our website, www.newscotlandpc.com and filling out the form there, you can even pre-pay there, if you like. If you would rather avoid the computer, place your order by calling the church office, 518-439-6454, and we will call you back to confirm your order.

If you can volunteer to work the event, please be in touch with John Griffin, who is coordinating, so he knows there are enough volunteers.

We also have flyers that can be posted around town or given to your neighbors, just stop and pick them up from the table in the church lobby.

As we prepare for worship, I'd like to note that we are in the midst of four weeks celebrating the Season of Creation. This is the third week, designated as River Sunday.

The flowers on the pulpit are given to the glory of God by the Dwyers. Thank you!

Call to Worship

We gather in the name of the triune God: our Creator, the fountain of life; our Christ, the pulse of life; and the Spirit, the breath of life. Our God is holy, and the whole earth is filled with God's presence. Let us worship God together.

Hymn

Choir

“My Life Flows on in Endless Song”

Opening Prayer

God our Creator, your glory fills our planet. Help us to discern your energetic presence among us, especially in the riches of our rivers. As we gather for worship, show us your presence in all creation. Help us to appreciate the wonders you have made: creeks and streams, aquifers and rivers. Let us join the songs of praise of perch and trout, loon and heron, ducks and dragonflies, frogs and turtles. Forgive us when we have forgotten your garden planet and treated this earth as a beast to be tamed or a place to be ruled. Forgive us when we have poisoned and polluted your waters. Forgive us, O God, when we live only for ourselves and apart from you. Lift our spirits to rejoice with the vibrant life of your creation. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Sisters and Brothers in Christ: the promise of scripture is that mercy and love surround us always. Our Creator cherishes us, heals us, and offers us the grace we need for new beginnings. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Epistle Lesson Revelation 22:1-5

¹ Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³ Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; ⁴ they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Kids' Time

For those unable to see the video, the children's sermon is about how God made rivers, how wonderful they are, and the promise that when God takes away all that is sad and bad in the world, there will be a beautiful river to enjoy in the City of God. Now it's time to see the photos that remind us of God's love and hope and joy. {photos.}

Keep sending us your photos so we can share them in the coming weeks –

Next week is Forest Sunday, and we would love to see your pictures of forests!

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the beautiful world you made, and for the ways that rivers bring us water to live, and fun times we can enjoy. Help us to listen for your presence in all creation and in your scriptures, so that we can remember the promises you have made that we are never alone, and that you will bring everything to a good end, and that your love is always flowing around us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Song

"Peace Like a River"

Choir

Old Testament Lesson Genesis 9:8-17

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." ¹² God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³ I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God

and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.”¹⁷ God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

Gospel Lesson Matthew 28:1-10

¹ After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” ⁸ So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Sermon

This is the third week in the Season of Creation – River Sunday. As you heard in the children’s time, I love to be on a river. I read this week that 50% of the world’s population lives within 2 miles of a river, and only 10% lives more than 6 miles from a river.^[1] Just as we are never far from a physical river, we are never far from a story about a river in our scriptures. The Bible has rivers from the beginning to the end. In Genesis it says there is a river flowing out of Eden to water the garden, and describes how it divides into four branches, bringing water to the world beyond (Gen 2:10). In Revelation it says when we come to the end of days in the City of God, there is a river flowing from the throne of God.

Professor Barbara Rossing points out that rivers are pivotal in biblical geography. “God encounters people at river crossings, such as the Jabbok River where Jacob wrestled with God, or the Jordan River where the Israelites crossed over on stones. River reeds protected the infant Moses, whose name means ‘I drew him out of the water’ (Exod. 2:3, 10).” Rivers are also places of healing, like the cleansing of Naaman the Syrian from his leprosy (2 Kgs. 5:12). A psalmist sings “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God” (Ps. 46:4). The prophet Ezekiel envisions a wondrous river flowing out from the new temple bringing life to all it touches (Ezekiel 47).

In the New Testament, Jesus says those who believe in him will have rivers of living water flowing from their inmost being (John 7:37–38). Baptisms, of course, were often at rivers, with John the Baptist at the Jordan, and the place of prayer beside the river where Lydia and her community were baptized in Philippi (Acts 16). And in Revelation, there is an invitation to everyone who thirsts to come to river of life, and take the water as a free gift (Rev. 22:17).^[2]

Rivers are a source of spiritual life as well as physical life. In reading about rivers this week, I learned about watersheds. A watershed is an area of

land from which water drains into a stream or river or underground aquifer. All of the land on earth is part of a watershed, because rain and snow are always being pulled by gravity over and through the land to join together at the lowest spot and become flowing water. Any water we see running through our yards or neighborhoods is part of our watershed.

I looked up our local watersheds. Voorheesville is part of the Vly Creek-Normans Kill watershed (Hydrologic Unit Code 020200060206). Slingerlands and Delmar are part of the Vloman Kill watershed (HUC 020200060401). And we are all part of the larger Hudson River watershed (HUC 02020006).^[3]

I also learned about John Wesley Powell, a geologist and explorer in the late 1800's. He spent time exploring and mapping the western rivers of our country, and became the director of the U.S. Geological Survey. Through his explorations, he realized that the limited water in the west would lead to conflict and he suggested that state boundaries should be determined by watersheds. We've seen in recent years how states fight over water rights – when I've been on retreat in New Mexico or Arizona, I always hear those residents discussing the battles of where the water from the Colorado or Rio Grande is going; when I lived in Alabama in the late 1980's, Atlanta, Georgia, was going through a boom time, and there were all kinds of battles going on about whether water would be taken away from places in Alabama in order to support the growing population of Atlanta.

Powell was prescient in understanding how these battles would come to be. In 2013, a land-use planner in Montana, John Lavey, decided to create Powell's vision, and he drew a map of what our continental states would look like if they were based on our watersheds. It's called "The United Watershed States of America," and looks like this. {See map image on page 8.}^[4]

It's interesting to see how different our states look by following what God has made. Lavey notes that each watershed has its own ecosystem. What would it be like if we organized our communities around the natural habitats God has made rather than the lines men have drawn on paper?

Our scriptures today encourage us to consider what God has made, and the relationship we have, or maybe should have, with non-human parts of creation.

When we go back to Noah's story from today, we heard about the very first covenant that God made with humanity: the promise to never again destroy by flood. What is remarkable is that the covenant is not just for humanity. God says the covenant is for every living creature (Gen 9:10), and for the earth itself (Gen 9:11). God will not destroy by flood humans or animals or the earth, God promises. By naming all of us, it is clear that God made us to be together; God means for us to be in relationship with one another – humans and animals and earth.

In the gospel story, we hear how the earth was actively responding to Jesus' resurrection. We remember a few verses earlier, when Jesus was crucified, the earth shook and the rocks split at his death. Jesus was laid in a tomb hewn in the rock – "in the heart of the earth," as he had predicted to his disciples earlier (Matt. 12:40) – with a stone sealed over the opening. When the women went on Sunday morning, there was an earthquake, and an angel that

looked like lightning, so hear again, we see how the natural elements are part of the story of what is happening in Jesus' death and resurrection.

Then, when Jesus talked with the women, he said, "Tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." It's important to note that Matthew does not have an ascension story about Jesus. In this gospel, Jesus is going ahead of them into the world, not going away from the world. Like a mighty river rising from a small source, Jesus' love and his presence is still spreading from that source – the empty tomb – to fill our entire world.

The gospel ends with the great commission to go and "make disciples of all nations" – a charge to us to get busy working in the world to be aware of God's presence that is still here, and to make others aware of that presence. The last sentence is a reminder of God's promise, "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." God's presence is here with us on earth.

That brings us back to Revelation. Many people read the book of Revelation and see only scary images of damnation. But that is not the point of the book of Revelation. The point is the promise of God's presence with us, on earth, for eternity. The description we are given is God renewing this earth and establishing the City of God here. The ultimate image of our scriptures is the picture of a river that flows out from the throne of God. It's a river that nourishes the tree of life, which continuously feeds and heals. The waters of the river are bright and crystal clear. There are no more problems, no more corruption, no more worries. The earth trembles with anticipation of the fullness of this blessed promise.

On this River Sunday, may we be renewed by the anticipation of this promise. May we remember our connection to the earth God made and loves. May we remember the promise of God to put the river of life into the hearts of all believers (John 7:38). May we be like drops of rain on the watershed, connecting one to another, joining together until we are part of a mighty river of love, flowing through this troubled world, knowing that it will not last forever.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Hymn

"Let All Things Now Living" #554 in The Presbyterian Hymnal

Choir

Pastoral Prayer

God of all creation, with everything you have made we join in praise. We give you thanks for the ways this world leaves us amazed and awed, for the power and majesty we see in the elements of nature.

We pray, O God, that you will make our spirits sensitive to the cries of the elements, cries for the health of the air, the clouds, the sky, the land, and the waters.

In your great mercy you call us to care for all your creation, to uphold one another, and to pray for your world. Hear our prayers for the healing of the earth ...for clean water that all may drink ... for the right use of resources and the careful tending of the land and the seas ... for people and places damaged by the violence of storms and fire, or the violence of war, or the violence of crime, or the violence of injustice, or domestic violence, or violence of any kind.

We pray for the leaders of nations, and pray that their hearts will be strengthened to work for justice for all your children.

O God of Healing, we pray for the sick and the dying, for those who suffer with hunger, homelessness, mental illness, or addiction. We pray for those who cannot find meaningful work, and those in prison, those who feel all alone, and those who are losing hope. And we pray for all those whom we have forgotten, knowing that nothing escapes your tender care. Turn our hearts, O God, that we may offer compassion, assistance, and healing.

We pray in Jesus' name. And we say the prayer he taught us:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Hymn

Choir

"All Things Bright and Beautiful" #267 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Offering

The psalmist says "The world belongs to God; the earth and all its people." We come into the world with nothing and we take nothing with us when we leave. Through God's love, we are given gifts that we can share with those in need, including the very creation God has made.

We give thanks for our many gifts. Churches depend on the generosity of members and friends to support their ministries. If you are able to mail in an offering, or give online at <https://www.newscotlandpc.com/>, we are grateful. If all you can do is offer prayers for the church, we love you for that gift. Whether it's money, time, attention, a phone call, a text, an e-mail, a smile, a decoration in your window or yard – there are so many ways we can reach out to others and know we are not alone. We are blessed to be able to connect to one another and to love one another. Thank you for your generous giving!

Song of Praise

Ryan Dwyer

These are probably the most-sung lines in the last 300 years, so here are both the traditional words, and another variation:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above, you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Christ the Word in flesh born low;
Praise Holy Spirit evermore;
One God, Triune, whom we adore.

Announcements

- 1) We have a chicken & rib bbq coming up Thursday, October 8, take-out only. Orders are now being taken on our website www.newscotlandpc.com or by phoning the church office, 518-439-6454
- 2) We have all seen the devastating pictures of the wildfires in California and the Pacific Northwest. You might remember that our Administrator, Kat, came to us from that area, and she is an artist. Kat is selling some of her artwork as a fundraiser, the proceeds are for the United Way in Oregon. You can see the computer links for her fundraiser in our daily e-mail, or you can send a donation directly to:

United Way of the Mid-Willamette Valley
455 Bliler Ave NE
Salem OR 97301

- 3) Presbyterian Disaster Assistance also helps areas in crisis, and has accounts to help recovery from recent hurricanes, fires, storms, and the pandemic. You can donate online at <https://pda.pcusa.org/> or send a check to Presbyterian Church (USA) with the account code noted on your check. The code for Hurricane Sally is DR000169; for current wildfires DR000165, for Hurricane Laura DR000194, for Iowa derecho DR000015, for COVID-19 is DR000148:

Presbyterian Church (USA)
PO Box 643700
Pittsburgh PA 15264

Benediction and Blessing

Christ calls us to be his disciples, to serve him with love and compassion, to serve Earth by caring for creation, honoring the rivers God has created, and providing all creatures with the water of life.

And may the God of hope, who is above all and through all and in all, fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, you may abound in hope, both this day and always. Amen.

Choral Benediction

Choir

May the good Lord bless and keep you, whether near or far away,
May you find that long awaited golden day today.
May your troubles all be small ones, and your fortunes ten times ten,
May the good Lord bless and keep you 'til we meet again.

Postlude

Ryan Dwyer

“Down to the River to Pray”

Sermon Notes and Graphic

[1] <https://www.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3110782/ncbi.nlm>

[2] These two paragraphs based on the chapter by Barbara R. Rossing in The Season of Creation by the Rev. Norman C. Habel (pp. 112-113). Fortress Press. Kindle Edition.

[3] A Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) is the “address” of the watershed; the numbers are like ZIP Codes, the first numbers indicate larger areas and the last four numbers are smaller, more specific, areas. HUC’s can be found at <https://mywaterway.epa.gov/>

[4] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/govbeat/wp/2013/11/19/map-the-united-states-of-watersheds/>



John Wesley Powell, the director of the U.S. Geological Survey in the late 1800’s, suggested that state boundaries should be set by watersheds to keep States from fighting over water rights. Around 2013, a land-use planner in Montana, John Lavey, drew this map of what our continental states would look like if they were based on our watersheds.