

The Source and Flow of Life

Joel 3: 16-18 & John 7: 37-39

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time/ 6th August 2006

Most weeks, as the ushers bring forward the offering, we sing, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow: Praise Him all creatures here below; Praise Him above, ye heavenly host; Praise Father, Son, & Holy Ghost.” Small, simple phrases (written in 1693), sung to a familiar tune (from 1551).¹ It’s so familiar that we probably don’t even realize what we’re saying. But we present our offerings to God and praise God for them because we acknowledge this important Biblical truth: *all blessings flow from God.*

Throughout Scripture, God is viewed as source. God is the source of *life*, the source of *love*, the source of *light*. God is the source of *goodness*, the source of *justice*, the source of everything that is *good*. From God, as source, flows forth blessing upon blessing upon the earth, grace upon grace upon God’s people. Blessing, in our text from Joel, is viewed as the flowing of water. Favor is bestowed in the form of things that flow - like water, like blessings, like grace, or like justice.² Did not Amos cry, “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream (Amos 65:24)”? In the text from John, Jesus tells us what life is like when we’re in relationship with him. “Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.”

¹This Doxology was written in 1693 by the English Protestant minister, Thomas Ken (1637-1711) and set to the tune OLD HUNDREDTH from the *Genevan Psalter* of 1551.

²See also Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1990) for the creative dimensions of flow experiences. This work has informed my thinking here. Although, Csikszentmihalyi, influenced by a reductionistic social-science perspective, lacks a theological, or specifically Christological framework for understanding human experience.

One of John Calvin's (1509-1564) favorite images for God, and one that has become important to me, is the picture of God as a font of all goodness - *fons omnium bonorum*.³ The fountain of God's love flows unceasingly. God's love is poured out upon all people through Christ. Whatever grace, whatever love, whatever goodness, peace, joy, and even justice we experience in our lives flows from the heart of God, whose blessings flow out upon God's children.

But often we can't see the blessing, or feel it, or believe it. Sometimes we can't sense the fountain drenching us with blessing. Sometimes we feel the Spirit is flowing in others, blessing them, showering them with goodness, but not in us. Maybe you feel showered with judgment or criticism or even punishment, not blessing. Blessings for others, but not for me. If that's true for you, then how do we get the river of life flowing again? What's hindering the flow of Christ's life-giving waters in your life?

Let me tell you a story. Many years ago, I suffered from chronic bronchitis. I had been to doctor after doctor, tried different antibiotics, nothing worked. Someone suggested that I see a chiropractor. I had been to one years before after being in a car accident, so I was open to going again. I started going twice a week, and then in a few weeks my sinuses cleared, as did the infection in my chest. I went to one for years, stopped, but recently started seeing one again. Now, what I'm going to share is not a recommendation for chiropractic. I am not suggesting that chiropractors are better than a general internist. I still go to an

³See B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 26. Cf. also the quotation in the bulletin, "Spirit of life and of power,/ Now flow in us, fount of our being,/ Light that enlightens us all,/ Life that in all may abide." Venatius Honorius Fortunatus (c. 530-609), Bishop of Poitiers, France.

internist. I'm not implying that anyone here should try chiropractic. (But if you're curious, I can recommend a good one.)

Chiropractic is not simply a technique to heal back pain. It is a unique approach to overall health and healing of the entire body.⁴ “It is not very complex to understand that all living things consist of both matter and energy - the human being is no exception. We are matter (the body with all of its organs and parts) which is kept alive and functioning by energy,” we could call is Life Energy. The brain is the source of this power. It generates the Life Energy needed to keep us alive. “In order for the Life Energy to get from the brain to all the organs and parts of the body, it needs something to carry it. Just as electrical energy travels over wires, Life Energy travels over the wiring system of our bodies, the Nervous System. Life Energy flows from the Brain, down to a thick master cable, the Spinal Cord, which carries it to the trunk, and then the energy travels out to the whole body over the spinal nerves. These nerves, these wires, divide and travel throughout the entire body, to supply it with life.”

“But what can reduce the flow of Life Energy? The brain is the only organ encased in solid bone. The spinal cord - the extension of the brain running down the back - is also vital to life and health, a thick cable consisting of billions of delicate **nerve givers carry??** the Life Energy from the brain to the body. These nerves need to be protected, but they cannot be completely encased. The nerves move through the twenty-four vertebrae in the spine, and from the spine, the nerves bring life from the brain to all the organs of the body.”

“Now, any of the twenty-four moveable spinal bones can be wrenched out of place by many of our daily jolts, bumps, twists, slips or jars. We all do dozens of things everyday that can knock or

⁴I will be quoting at length from a brochure entitled “Searching for Health,” that summarizes chiropractic.

wrench one of these spinal bones out of place. When this happens the bone will press on a nerve, irritate it, and thus interfere with the transmission of energy from the brain to the body. It will decrease the flow of life into some part of the body. Chiropractors have a name for a bone in the spine that has slipped out of its normal place and gotten stuck - out of position. It is called a *subluxation*. The bone is not broken, fractured or dislocated, just stuck out of place. Eventually, the subluxated bone will begin to pinch, then irritate, and finally interfere with the spinal nerves that carry Life Energy from the brain to the body. Subluxations are like short circuits in that they deprive parts of the body of full energy. What chiropractors then do is *adjust* the bones, gently placing them back into place, which then allows a free flow of Life Energy from your brain to the rest of your body. After an adjustment, the Life Energy is free to flow from the source of power, in the brain, to the rest of the body.”

And it is here that I see the parallel with the life of faith. For isn't God the source of all life, longing to give life to all things and people? Did not Jesus say that, "I have come to bring life abundant (John 10:10)"? God is the source of every good and perfect gift, pouring forth blessing after blessing, as James said. (James 1:17). But there are subluxations in our spiritual bodies, too. There are places in our lives where we are stuck, where the "bones" of our life have been slightly moved, jolted and bumped by the daily circumstances of life. I believe that God's love is freely flowing in this amazing universe, but there are blockages. We might not be sure about how they got there - whether we blocked the flow of God's love in our lives, or someone or something else has hindered our ability to receive God's life. Either way, we know there's something blocking the flow of God's love. When these spiritual blockages are present, we can still function in life, but we know that we're not truly healthy, we feel spiritually weak, lacking energy and commitment. Our lives are full of subluxations.

There are parts of our lives where we feel stuck, as if we're not going anywhere. We're busy, making money, advancing our careers, growing our families. The wheels are turning, but we're stuck in one place. Psychologists describe some forms of depression as being stuck - stuck in time, stuck in a feeling or emotion, stuck in a thought, stuck with a self-image that hinders your ability to flow, to get on with your life, which obstructs your ability to move. Think of Miss Havesham in Dickens' (1812-1870) *Great Expectations*, truly one of the most memorable characters in English literature. Abandoned by her fiancé on her wedding day, time stopped. She stopped the clock, remained in her wedding dress, and sat alone in the dark, great hall of her house with the rotting wedding cake. Her life came to a dead stop and she could not move on.

Others feel as if their lives are dammed up, blocked. They have all this energy inside, have all these ideas, but the energy is all bottled up somewhere, it cannot flow.

Individuals and relationships, businesses and families, churches get into a flow where things are happening, growth is taking place, healthy relationships are enriched, but then something happens, a conflict develops, or trauma, or tragedy, or major loss and that flow comes to a grinding halt. Life was flowing for me when my mother died at 59 from a heart attack fourteen years ago. And then, like a hammer-blow my father told me the news. Everything stopped, and it took years for my life to start flowing again.

Sometimes our lives become stuck when we lose our way, as in mid-life. Significantly, the beginning of Dante's (1263-1321) epic poem, the *Comedia* or *The Divine Comedy* is set at midlife in a dark wood having lost his way.² There are times when we reevaluate our

² "In the middle of the journey of life I came to myself within a dark wood where the straight way was lost. Ah, how hard a thing it is to tell of that wood, savage and harsh and dense, the thought

lives and ask who we really are, and what we really want in life. The mid-life crisis is a blockage because life doesn't flow as it once did; you've lost your way, lost your step, lost your rhythm. Everything stops.

I believe that God's blessings are flowing freely all the time and God wants His life to flow through us. When God's life flows through us, we are given *more* life, we find ourselves flowing with God's Spirit. There are two Greek words for "life": *bios*, which refers to basic, functional life, from which we get the word "biology"; and then there's *zoe*, which means fulfilled life, meaningful life. When Jesus talks about giving life he's not talking about *bios*, about merely functioning, but about *zoe*, abundant life, life that gives and adds life to life. Life is more than biology. Indeed, our bodies and our minds cry out to be channels through which God's love moves out upon the world - *amazing!* - renewing the face of the earth (Psalm 104:30). And, I believe, the best in us wants to flow within the steady current of God's river of life. I think the best in us wants to flow with God, and feel God's love coursing through us. We were created, not just to function, but really live, to thrive. Yet there are subluxations, blockages.

What we need is a good adjustment by a spiritual chiropractor - and the best one I know is the Holy Spirit. But maybe we're afraid of the adjustment. Will it hurt? Yes, usually when we resist the Spirit. I find when I'm on the table at the chiropractor that if I'm tight or resistant the adjustment is not as effective as when I relax and work with the doctor. Sometimes it hurts more when we actually resist the Spirit. There is a deep fear of removing the obstacles - *because we're not exactly sure where it will lead us, where it will all end*. Sometimes we prefer the blockages, because it's what is known. It can become a

of which renews my fear! So bitter is it that death is hardly more. But to give account of the good which I found there I will tell of the other things I noted there." Canto I.

kind of crutch. We need to work with the Spirit; yield to what God is trying to do for us. We need to cooperate with the Spirit.

So, what will it take for the flow of life to resume in your life? What can we do to help resume the flow of the Spirit? What we can do is try to identify the blockages and let the Spirit adjust us, so that God's love can pour through us. We can do four things:

-Pray. Prayer is the best way of not only identifying the blockages, but of opening yourself up to the flow of the Spirit, working with God.

-Meditate (which is different from prayer). Meditate on God's Word - study the scriptures, especially the Psalms, allowing the words of the Bible become your words to God, listen for the voice of God. This requires being still and calming your mind.

-Assess. Honest self-assessment, a critical examination of our lives is essential. It has been said that the "Unexamined life is not worth living."³ The ancient Delphic Oracle said, "Know Thyself." This is the start of all wisdom.

-Finally, go deep and then let go. When we go deep we will discover the blockages: like unresolved anger and resentment or grief. They need to be dealt with, *in time*. Envy, jealousy, fear, we need to let them go, *at the right time*, need to get rid of the garbage and the clutter of our lives. Loosen our death-grip, stop holding on to life. "Let go and let God." It's a familiar and seemingly trite phrase, but true. *Let go and then flow.*

When the river of God's love starts to flow in us and through us, then the healing comes. It brings us to life, and through us, God

³ Socrates (470-399 BC).

brings life to the world. But it has to flow. “Praise God, from whom all blessings flow”

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