

Busy Water. 29 August 2021

Sometimes Niko - that's my Rhodesian Ridgeback, for those of you who have not yet had the pleasure of meeting him - sometimes Niko gets thought block - or maybe it's thought obsession. He knows that there is something else that he is supposed to do, but the same thing just keeps repeating over and over in his head; 'food, food, food, food!'

I have been having my 'Niko moment' this week, and the thought that keeps returning to me is 'water, water, water, water.'

Now it's possible that it is because we have had some much needed rain this week, which

has enabled me to escape having to water the church garden, but I think it may be more than that.

For whatever reason, I am going to try and go with it, and see where the Spirit leads. If you thought that you were going to get some words on today's gospel, then I'm afraid you are going to be disappointed. It is so similar and on the same theme as last Sunday's that you have already had that sermon. If you weren't here, you can find it on our church website where you can read it, download it, or even listen to it!

Another reason I feel that water is important is that we discussed it in relation to the love

of God in our Book Club this week, and I felt that the imagery was profound.

We frequently see pictures of still water with beautiful reflections on its mirror-like surface, and are reminded to 'be still', and that is good and helpful for our meditative life; it helps us to centre down into the quietness of our souls and draw close to God. That is a special and a precious place to be.

But the vision I have had this week is not of such a tranquil scene; the water I see today is busy; it is active, it is sparkling with energy and life - and nothing can stop it.

As a child, I am sure you will have played the game of paper, scissors, stone, where you and an opponent count to three and then come out with a hand form that represents either one of the three. Whichever you produce will either win or lose; paper wraps stone, stone blunts scissors, and scissors cut paper.

But water defeats them all; it turns paper into mush, rusts and blunts scissors, and eventually wears away stone or breaks it. That seemingly most benign of elements is, in fact, the most powerful in nature. We have only to witness the devastation of a tsunami or the floods that have recently occurred in Europe. Even fishing in a river can be dangerous, as a friend

of mine lost his footing on the bottom of a river when he was fly fishing, his waders filled up with water and he was pulled under and drowned in moments.

You don't mess with water.

Norman Carroll, the author of one of the books we have read in our Book Club, and who joins us from Florida by zoom, likes to use the image of a river or stream of water to represent the love of God; it touches everything in its path, whether it be a grassy field or rocky rapids, and the topography of the stream bed represents our lives. We may be in turmoil and spinning in eddies, we may be crashing over boulders, we may be quietly

flowing around peaceful bends - but the love of God never leaves us; it pervades everything, and never stops flowing.

There is a glitch in the image though, which is that a stream in our world has a beginning and has an end, but the love of God has no beginning and has no end, for God is infinite and eternal.

I recently saw a You Tube clip of a defence of belief in God being challenged by a rather smug atheist. He asked his fellow debater where God came from, and the answer he got was that it was a silly question, because if God came from somewhere, then He was

immediately constrained by time, space and matter - which would make Him no greater than his creation. To say that God 'came from' somewhere would immediately make your God too small. It is necessary to understand - insofar as our little minds can - that God is eternal and infinite, overarching everything, in everything, and pervading everything. It is not our God that is too small - it is that our imagery is too limited.

So we must imagine a stream or river with no beginning and no end. Ezekiel (47) describes a river coming out 'from under the threshold of the temple', which gets deeper and deeper, and in his vision, Ezekiel is led by a 'man' we can

assume to be an angel or messenger of God, and asks him, 'Son of man, do you see this?' He takes Ezekiel to the banks of the river where many different kinds of trees grow, and tells him, 'Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.'

The messenger also tells him that where the river meets the sea, the water will turn fresh.

All of these images are demonstrations of the love of God. But it would not be fair to take this completely out of context. In Ezekiel 29 we read that God has him prophesy against Pharaoh, saying that the Nile river will be a source of desolation and ruin; Moses in Exodus warns the Pharaoh then that the Nile will run

with blood; Isaiah warns that the Nile will 'thin out and dry up'.

Not all images of rivers are life-giving.

But we should turn to the New Testament after such a dose of Old Testament doom and gloom, and look at all the positive ways in which rivers were used.

Baptism might be a useful start - an extension of the older rite of ritual cleansing by full body immersion - Tvilah - which would have been traditionally done in a mikveh or a natural stream; the point being that the water is 'living' - it is not a basin full of static water; it is poured over the hands, or if full immersion is needed, then if a natural stream is not

nearby, then a mikveh or bath of running water is used.

Note here the Jewish need for running or 'living' water. This is exactly how Jesus refers to himself when he talks with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4.

But more than that, he says in John 7 that whoever believes in him, from him - that person - will flow streams of living water, by which he meant his Spirit.

Now here is something for us to truly feast on. Not only does Jesus say that if we come to him he will give us living water, but that if we

believe in Him, then living water - his Holy Spirit - will flow from us!

Now if we return to the image of the river in Ezekiel that gives life to everything along its banks and everything within it, and then to the river described in Revelation 22; 'Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb... the quote is so similar to that in Ezekiel; what this shows us is that the source of the river - or of Norm Carroll's stream is God Himself - that is why it has no beginning and has no end.

So now we have a real chance to do some good with these old but eternal images; we - that's you and I - can access this water! All we have to do is approach Jesus with faith and penitence, and the water of life is ours!

But remember - it is busy water - it cannot stay still, it has a job to do. It has to keep on flowing; James told us in our epistle that we must be doers and not just readers and listeners.

Our water has to go on flowing out to other people to give them life. We have to give it away -and we can because we are constantly replenished by the source, which is God himself in Jesus.

You won't find any other religion or doctrine
that will give you a gift like this - and it's an
offer of eternal love for you, and for you to
pass on to all with whom you come into contact
- as Jesus did.

Remember, we are his hands and his feet, his
tongue and his heart here on earth. That is a
big commission - but hey! - Nothing beats the
power of busy water!