Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
"What type of river flows through us?"
(Pentecost Sunday Sermon)
June 8, 2025

Scripture

Ezekiel 47:1-12
John 7:37-39

Core Idea and purpose

Core ideas from earlier sermons in the series:

- None. Only one sermon in this series

Core Idea: If the Holy Spirit flows like a river through our hearts and into the hearts of other people, what type of river will we be?

Purpose: To encourage people to assess how well the Holy Spirit can flow through our heart?

The Sermon

When I was a Boy Scout, my troop would go on what we called the Mountain Trip. We spent two weeks in the North Carolina mountains. The first week, we stayed at a base camp and the second week we went backpacking on the Appalachian Trail.

During that first week, we camped next to a big mountain stream. Playing in a mountain stream is one of the most fun things I've ever done. We would go down the stream on our backs, build damns, try to walk up stream, and bathe in the stream. At night, the sound of the rushing stream would lull me to sleep. I think I will convince my wife and son that they want to go camping in the mountains next to a stream.

People and animals tend to congregate around living water such as streams and rivers because they sustain life. If you want to see the biodiversity of a forest, woodland, or jungle, you go to the river. Look at Egypt. That country is mostly desert, but travel along the Nile and you find abundant life! Rivers bring and sustain life! That's why we built most of our major cities next to giant rivers: Washington D.C. – Potomac River, London, England – Thames, Moscow, Russia – Moskva River, Jacksonville, FL. – St. John's River, and Miami – Miami River.

So, it shouldn't surprise us that the Bible uses living water (Water with movement, such as streams and rivers) as metaphors to describe God as the source and sustainer of life. Psalm 1:3 – Those who follow God's Law are like a tree planted by a stream; Psalm 46:4-5 – States that there is a life sustaining river running through Jerusalem. (Jerusalem is one of the few major cities that is

not located next to a river or large body of water. The river referred to here is symbolizing God's presence. The Lord God is the river that sustains life for the inhabitants of Jerusalem) Genesis describes a river running through the Garden of Eden; to show how good everything was before sin entered the world. Ezekiel and Revelation describe a river sustaining a redeemed world. In all these passages, the Bible uses a stream or river to describe God as the source and sustainer of life.

Jesus takes this metaphor of living water one step further and describes the Holy Spirit as 'rivers of living water.' In John 7:38 Jesus says, "Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." Then the very next verse explains, "By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified."

The 'rivers of living water' that flows through us is the Holy Spirit. Later, in John chapters 14 & 16, Jesus promises that every believer will receive the Holy Spirit. God fulfilled this promise during the Jewish festival of Pentecost as described in Acts 2:1-12 when the Holy Spirit descended on the church. Every believer in Jesus Christ has the Holy Spirit residing in his or her heart.

Now, let this image form in your mind. The Holy Spirit is like a river that doesn't simply fill our hearts but flows through us into the world – filling the world with God's love. The Holy Spirit is not meant to pool inside our hearts, becoming a mosquito infested puddle or pond. The Holy Spirit is meant to eternally flow through our hearts and touch the hearts of all those around us. Along with being like a dove (Matthew 3:16), fire (Acts 2:1-12), and wind (John 3:5-8), the Holy Spirit is also like a river eternally flowing through our hearts.

This potentially makes every Christian an extremely influential and powerful force for goodness, love, and justice. Remember, the Holy Spirit is God - the Third Person in the Trinity. So, it is God flowing through us like a river to touch the hearts of those around us. There is nothing more influential or powerful than God.

If this is true, then we must ask: What type of Holy Spirit River flows through our hearts?

Is it a tiny trickle that drips down some mountain rocks? Is the Holy Spirit barely seeping out of our hearts?

Is it a small stream? The Holy Spirit is flowing through us but not always in a big way. Sometimes it dries up. People may or may not experience the love of God because of our presence.

Is it a major river, like the mighty Mississippi? The Holy Spirit is flowing through us in a mighty way. People can't help but notice God's love as it relentlessly flows through us. It will never dry up but always overpower any obstacle.

None of us should be content with a trickle or small stream flowing through our hearts. We should all desire to have the mighty Mississippi flowing through us. How do we open our hearts so that the Holy Spirit becomes like the mighty Mississippi flowing through us?

First, we must have continuous repentance. It's the sinful desires within our hearts that keep the Spirit from flowing through us. Sin separates us from God and the Holy Spirit is God. So, if we have sinful attitudes within our hearts, the Holy Spirit can't flow through us.

Think of all the sinful attitudes and desires within our hearts as big concrete blocks. As these blocks multiply, they come together to create a massive damn. With enough sin, the damn becomes massive enough to turn a river like the mighty Mississippi into a little trickle or dry stream. But, as we repent, the current of the Holy Spirit River strengthens and pushes the concrete blocks out of the way.

As a pastor, it's easy for me to become jealous of a bigger church that has ministries and resources my church doesn't have. As a result of this jealousy, I find myself talking badly about that church. When this jealousy stays in my heart, it grows, creates more concrete blocks, and becomes a damn that's big enough to stop the Holy Spirit River from flowing through me. However, after I repent, God forgives my sinful attitude and removes it from my heart. Then the Holy Spirit River gushes forward, drenching those around me with God's grace.

The second thing we do to open our hearts so that the Holy Spirit becomes like the mighty Mississippi flowing through us is cooperate with the Holy Spirit. It's the Holy Spirit who convicts us of sins. After we repent, it's the Holy Spirit who cleanses our hearts of that sin. For the Holy Spirit to do this, we must cooperate with the Holy Spirit. The primary ways to cooperate with the Spirit are prayer & fasting, Bible study, worship, small group fellowship/accountability, service & generosity.

Through these practices, the Holy Spirit will touch and change our hearts. The Spirit will cleanse our hearts of sinful desires and replace those desires with

God's love. As this happens, the Spirit will be able to flow more powerfully through us to touch the hearts of those around us.

I invite you to sit back and picture a person you know who exudes love, joy, and peace. Whenever this person walks into a room, this person doesn't have to speak or do anything. This person's mere presence creates an atmosphere of love, joy, and peace. The Holy Spirit River that flows through this person is like the mighty Mississippi.

Back in 2015 I met a wonderful lady named Claudette Forde. Everywhere she went, she brought peace and love. She transitioned into the next phase of eternal life on Easter 2016. She was 82 ½ years old.

At her Memorial Service, I described her as strong, silent, and sweet. She was strong because she always put others before herself. On the day she died, Claudette told her friend that she would look after her friend's bedridden and ailing husband, even though she didn't feel good. Later that day, Claudette's granddaughter rushed her to the hospital where she died. Up to the very end, she thought of others first. She was silent because she quietly served others and volunteered with little regard for recognition. And she was sweet because she always lifted people up. She never gossiped or said an unkind word. Her mere presence created an atmosphere of love, joy, and peace. The Holy Spirit River flowing through her was like the mighty Mississippi.

When I was a cadet at the Virginia Military Institute, I met my good friend's grandmother. We called her Grandma Tweedy. She exuded a sweet, loving spirit. Her presence created a calm, loving atmosphere. None of us cadets could say anything nasty or mean in her presence. When she was around, we respected each other and demonstrated love. We did this, not because she demanded it from us, but because she created an environment that made it natural for us to be good & loving. Like Claudette Forde, the Holy Spirit River running through Grandma Tweedy's heart was like the mighty Mississippi.

We can all be like Claudette Forde or Grandma Tweedy. All of us can have the Holy Spirit flowing through our hearts like the mighty Mississippi if we practice continuous repentance and cooperate with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirt River running through our hearts may start out as a small trickle but, like the river in Ezekiel's vision, it will get bigger and stronger until it becomes like the mighty Mississippi.

Let's pray.

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Sermon Outline

I. Introduction: Steams and rivers are sources of life
   A. When I was a Boy Scout, my troop would go on what we called the Mountain Trip.
      - We spent two weeks in the North Carolina mountains.
        - The first week, we stayed at a base camp.
        - The second week we went backpacking on the Appalachian Trail.
      - During that first week, we camped next to a big mountain stream.
        - Playing in mountain stream is one of the most fun things I've ever done.
          - We would go down the stream on our backs,
          - build damns,
          - try to walk up stream, and bathe in the stream.
        - At night, the sound of the rushing stream would lull me to sleep.
        - I think I will convince my wife and son that they want to go camping in the mountains next to a stream.
   B. People and animals tend to congregate around living water such as streams and rivers because they sustain life.
   C. That's why we built most of our major cities next to giant rivers:
      - Washington D.C. – Potomac River,
      - London, England – Thames,
      - Moscow, Russia – Moskva River,
      - Jacksonville, FL. – St. John's River, and
      - Miami – Miami River.
II. So, it shouldn't surprise us that the Bible uses living water (Water with movement, such as streams and rivers) as metaphors to describe God as the source and sustainer of life.

A. Psalm 1:3 – Those who follow God's Law are like a tree planted by a stream;
B. Psalm 46:4-5 – States that there is a life sustaining river running through Jerusalem. (Jerusalem is one of the few major cities that is not located next to a river or large body of water. The river referred to here is symbolizing God's presence. The Lord God is the river that sustains life for the inhabitants of Jerusalem)
C. Genesis describes a river running through the Garden of Eden; to show how good everything was before sin entered the world.
D. Ezekiel and Revelation describe a river sustaining a redeemed world.
E. In all these passages, the Bible uses a stream or river to describe God as the source and sustainer of life.

III. Jesus takes this metaphor of living water one step further and describes the Holy Spirit as 'rivers of living water.'

A. In John 7:38 Jesus says, "Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."
    - Then the very next verse explains, "By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified."
B. The 'rivers of living water' that flows through us is the Holy Spirit.
    - Later, in John chapters 14 & 16, Jesus promises that every believer will receive the Holy Spirit.
    - God fulfilled this promise during the Jewish festival of Pentecost as described in Acts 2:1-12 when the Holy Spirit descended on the church.
    - Every believer in Jesus Christ has the Holy Spirit residing in his or her heart.
C. Now, let this image form in your mind.

- The Holy Spirit is like a river that doesn't simply fill our hearts but flows through us into the world – filling the world with God's love.
- The Holy Spirit is not meant to pool inside our hearts, becoming a mosquito infested puddle or pond.
- The Holy Spirit is meant to eternally flow through our hearts and touch the hearts of all those around us.
- Along with being like a dove, fire, and wind, the Holy Spirit is also like a river eternally flowing through our hearts.

D. This potentially makes every Christian an extremely influential and powerful force for goodness, love, and justice.
   - Remember, the Holy Spirit is God - the Third Person in the Trinity.
   - So, it is God flowing through us like a river to touch the hearts of those around us.
   - There is nothing more influential or powerful than God.

IV. If this is true, then we must ask: What type of Holy Spirit River flows through our hearts?

A. Is it a tiny trickle that drips down some mountain rocks?
   - Is the Holy Spirit barely seeping out of our hearts?

B. Is it a small stream?
   - The Holy Spirit is flowing through us but not always in a big way.
   - Sometimes it dries up.
   - People may or may not experience the love of God because of our presence.

C. Is it a major river, like the mighty Mississippi?
   - The Holy Spirit is flowing through us in a mighty way.
   - People can't help but notice God's love as it relentlessly flows through us.
   - It will never dry up but always overpower any obstacle.

D. None of us should be content with a trickle or small stream flowing through our hearts.
    - We should all desire to have the mighty Mississippi flowing through us.
    - How do we open our hearts so that the Holy Spirit becomes like the mighty Mississippi flowing through us?

V. Opening our hearts so that the Holy Spirit becomes like the mighty Mississippi flowing through us

A. First, we must continuously repent.
    - It's the sinful desires within our hearts that keep the Spirit from flowing through us.
    - Sin separates us from God and the Holy Spirit is God.
    - So, if we have sinful attitudes within our hearts, the Holy Spirit can't flow through us.
    - Think of all the sinful attitudes and desires within our hearts as concrete bricks.
        - As these bricks multiply, they come together to create a massive damn.
        - With enough sin, the damn becomes massive enough to turn a river like the mighty Mississippi into a little trickle or dry stream.
    - As a pastor, it's easy for me to become jealous of a bigger church that has ministries and resources my church doesn't have.
        - As a result of this jealousy, I can find myself talking badly about that church.
        - When this jealousy stays in my heart, it festers and becomes a damn that's big enough to stop the Holy Spirit River from flowing through me.

- When this happens, there's almost no Holy Spirit flowing through me to touch the hearts of those around me.
- After repenting, God forgives my sinful attitude and removes it from my heart.
- Then the Holy Spirit River gushes forward, drenching the hearts of those around me.

B. The second thing we do to open our hearts so that the Holy Spirit becomes like the mighty Mississippi flowing through us is cooperate with the Holy Spirit.
   - It's the Holy Spirit who convicts us of sins.
   - After we repent, it's the Holy Spirit who cleanses our hearts of that sin.
   - For the Holy Spirit to do this, we must cooperate with the Holy Spirit.
   - The primary ways to cooperate with the Spirit are:
     - prayer & fasting,
     - Bible study,
     - worship,
     - small group fellowship/accountability,
     - service & generosity.
   - Through these practices, the Holy Spirit will touch and change our hearts.
     - The Spirit will cleanse our hearts of sinful desires and replace those desires with God's love.
     - As this happens, the Spirit will be able to flow more powerfully through us to touch the hearts of those around us.

VI. I invite you to sit back and picture a person you know who exude love, joy, and peace.

A. Whenever this person walks into a room, this person doesn't have to speak or do anything.
    - This person's mere presence creates an atmosphere of love, joy, and peace.
    - The Holy Spirit River that flows through this person is like the mighty Mississippi.
    - If you know anyone like that, then you know someone whose Holy Spirit River flows through him/her like the mighty Mississippi.

B. Back in 2015 I met a wonderful lady named Claudette Forde.
    - Everywhere she went, she brought peace and love.
    - She transitioned into the next phase of eternal life on Easter 2016. She was 82 ½ years old.
    - At her Memorial Service, I described her as strong, silent, and sweet.
        - She was strong because she always put others before herself.
            - On the day she died, she told her friend that she would look after her friend's bedridden and ailing husband, even though she didn't feel good.
            - Later that day, her granddaughter rushed her to the hospital where she died.
            - Up to the very end, she thought of others first.
        - She was silent because she quietly served others and volunteered with little regard for recognition.
        - And she was sweet because she always lifted people up. She never gossiped or said an unkind word.
    - Her mere presence created an atmosphere of love, joy, and peace.
    - The Holy Spirit River flowing through her was like the mighty Mississippi.

C. When I was a cadet at the Virginia Military Institute, I met my good friend's grandmother.

- We called her Grandma Tweedy.
- She exuded a sweet, loving spirit.
- Her presence created a calm, loving atmosphere.
- None of us cadets could say anything nasty or mean in her presence.
  - When she was around, we respected each other and demonstrated love.
  - We did this, not because she demanded it from us, but because she created an environment that compelled us to be good.
  - Like Claudette Forde, the Holy Spirit River running through Grandma Tweedy's heart was like the mighty Mississippi.

D. We can all be like Claudette Forde or Grandma Tweedy.

- All of us can have the Holy Spirit flowing through our hearts like the mighty Mississippi if we practice continuous repentance and cooperate with the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirt River running through our hearts may start out as a small trickle but, like the river in Ezekiel's vision, it will get bigger and stronger until it becomes like the mighty Mississippi.

Let's pray.