



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

October 15, 2017

"Streams of Living Water" (How to Pray Series) John 7:37-39

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On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified. - John 7:37-39

When I was a pastor in Northern California, one of the things we loved to do each summer with youth and young adults was to river raft the South Fork of the American River. The South Fork of the American River is not the most challenging river to run in the West but it's a ton of fun. Sometimes our guides would add to the excitement by running the rapid backwards. We would have huge water wars with other rafts. We'd jump out of the raft and swim some of the easier rapids. It was awesome on a hot summer day.

I have a good friend in California who is an expert whitewater kayaker. He asked me one day if I'd be up for giving whitewater kayaking a try. I said, "Sure!"

My lessons didn't start on the river. They started in a swimming pool in Richmond, California

where he taught me how to do what's called an Eskimo Roll. An Eskimo Roll is a very helpful skill to have when you flip your kayak on the river. I wish I had mastered it before he took me to the South Fork.

Everybody wears a helmet which helps protect your cranium in case you get thrown out of the raft or flip your kayak. There are lots of submerged rocks in the river and you don't want to have your noggin make contact with a boulder in the river.

There is actually another way to exit a whitewater kayak besides the Eskimo Roll and that technique is called a "wet exit." I perfected that technique. When you're in a kayak on a river, you're actually sealed into the boat. You're wearing a rubber skirt that makes a watertight seal with the kayak. And if you get flipped and if you can't right yourself using the Eskimo Roll, you can reach in front of you and pull a handle that will break the seal between the skirt you're wearing and the boat, which frees you to swim to the surface.

The day my friend took me to the South Fork of the American River, we spent a lot of time practicing how to enter the river once we were floating peacefully in an eddy along the shore. The two most important things to

remember when entering the river from an eddy is, one, you need to present the bottom of the kayak to the river as it flows downstream.

And, two, you need to remember that the river is very, very powerful. You're not going to be able to muscle your way onto the river or through it. You have to learn how to cooperate with the river. The river is in charge. Our task as kayakers is to accept that.

I can be, at times, a slow learner. That first afternoon in a whitewater kayak on the American River, I flipped my kayak an embarrassingly large number of times, just entering the river from that peaceful eddy along the shore.

I can still hear my friend patiently counsel me, "Tim, remember, the river is very powerful. You can't control it. You're going to just exhaust yourself if you try to muscle your way down the river. You need to cooperate with the river."

For most of this year, we've been in a series of sermons about prayer and along the way we've been learning some really important things about the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God is very powerful. The Spirit of God cannot be controlled. Our task as disciples of Jesus is to learn how to cooperate with the Spirit.

He wants to transform our lives and use us to impact the world around us, for good.

Today, I want to suggest five ways we might think about cooperating with the Spirit of God. I want to talk about what it means to be moving and growing and maturing in our life in the Spirit in a holistic way. And I'm going to do that by looking at five streams that define what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

I want to thank Pastor Steve for these insights on the five streams of Christian discipleship. If you want to go deeper into what I'm talking about today, Steve is teaching a class every Sunday morning on these streams of Christian discipleship. If you're a young adult in your 20s and 30s, I'm helping to facilitate a similar discussion on Sundays as well. Here are the five main areas of growth that should be increasingly in balance if we want to be whole and healthy disciples of Jesus.

First, how am I growing theologically? What I mean by that is, "Who do I understand God to be?"

Second, how am I maturing spiritually? How does God want to form Himself in me? What spiritual practices does God want me to develop so that I might increasingly reflect the presence of the Spirit of God in my life?

Third, what is the state of my emotional life? What feelings in me might need to be healed?

Fourth, how am I developing relationally? Which relationships in my life need more attention right now?

And finally, to what degree do I see myself as a person on mission with God in the world? What

person, place or community is God putting on my heart? Those are the five streams of Christian discipleship.

How am I learning to cooperate with the Spirit of God in each of those five areas?

Today, we're going to focus on only the middle three streams. I'll touch briefly on the first and fifth streams but we'll spend most of our time looking at how we're maturing spiritually, emotionally and relationally. And since this is a series on how to pray, I want to suggest that we consider using these five streams as a way to pray about each area of our discipleship. I'll illustrate what I mean by that at the end.

Let's start with theological maturity. Theological is a big fancy word that simply refers to the study of God. Who I believe God is will have a profound impact on who I understand myself to be and how I live my life. Who I believe God is, what He thinks of me and the world around me will shape everything about my life. If I believe God is primarily a crotchety, critical, taskmaster, I'm most likely going to live my life as a fearful, critical, judgmental person.

A few weeks ago I preached a sermon on the parable of the Good Samaritan. That story, and the entire life of Jesus tells us that God is not a crotchety, critical, taskmaster. He's a God who is filled with compassion. He's a God who loves us. He's a God who's rooting for us, pulling for us, cheering us on. He's a God who's not surprised by our human frailty. He is not knocked off his game by our occasional stupidity, okay, our frequent stupidity, or our big and bigger mistakes. He is a God who is mercy. And that's the best news anyone has ever told you. The God

we meet in Jesus Christ is a God who is mercy. If you believe that, if you learn to trust that, if you cooperate with the Spirit of God and settle down into that truth that God is mercy, you will begin to live with greater joy, deeper peace and greater confidence. That's all I'm going to say about that today. Check out my last sermon if you want to think about that some more.

What do you believe about God? That's discipleship stream number one. From that stream flow all the others.

Okay, let's jump in stream number 2. How does God want to form Himself in us? When I look honestly at the brokenness that is present in my life and I realize that God is a God of mercy, that realization leads me to greater humility. God loves humility. No one lived more humbly than Jesus.

In Luke chapter 18, Jesus told a story about humility. Listen to what he said. Luke 18 verse 9-14: **9** (Jesus) also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: **10** "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. **11** The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. **12** I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' **13** But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' **14** I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

The Pharisee was a good man but his heart was in the wrong place. The tax collector had made a lot of bad decisions but his heart was in the right place. Father Philip Chircop challenged us at the HIM Conference last March to approach God in prayer like the tax collector did. Father Phillip said, “Be a person who is close to the earth; be a person who never forgets that they are of the earth. Humble, human—those are words that refer to the earth. Never forget our fragile, clay beginnings. When I forget my fragile clay beginnings, when I place myself on a pedestal above other people, when I start playing God, it is then that I make all my most terrible mistakes. The moment I forget that I am of the earth is precisely then that I do a lot of damage.”

When we’re praying, when we confess our sins to God, Father Chircop suggested that we might simply do what the tax collector did. “One beautiful way to change our posture from pedestal to earth, is to gently beat our chests when we talk with God about those broken, rebellious areas in our lives. Give God our heart of stone so that he might give us a heart of flesh. Name those parts in our hearts that are still hard and stony.”

Our God can soften our hearts if we come to him in humility. But do you know what? There’s more to humility than that. Listen to what the Apostle Paul says at the beginning of chapter 2 in his letter to the Philippians, verses 1-4.

1 If (that word can also be translated ‘since’) then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, 2 make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do

nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.

4 Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

Did you hear what Paul said in these verses? Since we have every reason to be encouraged because we know Jesus Christ—then let’s live like Jesus did. Let’s not be consumed by our own selfish ambition. But take some of the energy and time and passion we would normally just burn on ourselves and invest it in the life of someone else so that they might become everything God wants them to be. Did you hear that? That’s what humility looks like.

Humility leads me back to that place where I remember that I’m not the center of the universe. The planets, my family, my co-workers are not in orbit around my life. It’s not all about me and my plans and my needs and my wants and my vision and my priorities. If I want to learn how to cooperate with God’s Spirit then God wants me to live humbly. He wants me to invest some of my life in the life of someone else so that they might see their dreams, their plans fulfilled, their hopes achieved. As I grow in this kind of humility I am learning how to cooperate with the Spirit of God. That’s an example of what we’ll discover in stream #2.

Let’s look briefly at the third stream of Christian discipleship and here’s where I’m going to start seriously meddling in many of our lives. This, my river rafting friends, is a stream of discipleship that is usually a class 4 or 5 rapid for most of us. What emotions need to be healed in us? There are lots of emotions that need healing in our lives but I’m just going to pick one.

Dallas Willard, a super smart Christian leader, once said, “Anger is the most fundamental problem in human life.” Do you agree? Anger is a big problem for many. Anger is tearing our nation and our world apart right now. There are a lot of things that are underneath our anger and we don’t have time to explore those today. But one of the primary symptoms of the pain and fear that is deep inside us sometimes is anger.

My friend Pete Docter directed the Pixar animated feature called “Inside Out”. It’s a fascinating look at five emotions that live inside of every person: sadness, joy, fear, disgust and anger. Pete directed this amazing story that takes us inside the emotional life of an adolescent girl who is having a very difficult time adjusting to her family’s recent move across the country (the trailer for this film is shown)

Anybody struggling with this guy (anger) this morning, this past week? Has this guy been a constant companion for years?

Anger is sometimes the shield we put up to protect ourselves, to push people away when deep wounds continue to fester inside us. God’s Spirit wants to be at work deep inside our lives, healing what’s hurting, helping us to address what makes us afraid and resolving the guilt we have over past mistakes.

Now stream number four. Our God is a triune God, Father, Son and Spirit. At the center of the universe is a relationship of love. And we are made in the image of that God so relationship is at the heart of who we are. Our God who is mercy is a God who wants to restore broken relationships and empower us to join him in ministry of restoration in our world.

Our God is not a passive God. Our God is a God who seeks the lost, the rejected, the ones left out and left behind. In Luke chapter 15, the religious leaders were complaining about who Jesus was hanging out with. Jesus got the reputation of being a friend to tax collectors and sinners of all kinds. They loved spending time with Him. He sought their friendship. Listen to the story Jesus tells the Pharisees in Luke 15 verses 1-7.

1 Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to (Jesus). 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

3 So he told them this parable:

4 "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?"

5 When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. 6

And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' 7 Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Jesus is telling the religious experts of His day that they do not really understand who God is. If they had truly known the heart and character of God they would not be surprised that Jesus loved spending time with the people the religious leaders rejected. Our God is a God who seeks the lost and broken in order to bless them. The Pharisees did not understand that God is a God of mercy and that they were in need of God's mercy as much as any other person. Instead of living in humility, they climbed up on a pedestal and looked down on others. And when they looked

down on tax collectors, sinners, and prostitutes they saw Jesus loving the people they rejected. If we want to grow in relational maturity we too, need to learn how to cooperate with the Spirit of God and seek out the people in our lives. And to do that we must first really begin to see them for who they truly are. We must live what the Apostle Paul challenges us to do in Philippians 2: *"In humility, look not only to our own interests but to the interests of others."*

There is a movie that has been out for quite a while called "October Sky". John Hickam is a West Virginia coal miner who loves his job and expects his son Homer played by Jake Gyllenhaal, to follow in his footsteps. But Homer has a different vision for his life, a vision that was encouraged by his high school teacher, Miss Riley (who is in the last days of her young life at the end of this film).

As I've thought about October Sky, I think John's dad was looking for validation of his own life choices and he was looking for that blessing from his son. And because he was so focused on what he thought his son needed to do for him, he could not really see who his son was.

In this scene we will show, it's the late 1950s and the United States is alarmed by the launch of the Russian satellite Sputnik 1. Homer and three of his buddies become interested in the science of rockets and with the encouragement and support of their teacher and many in their community, they enter a national science fair and win college scholarships. They are supported by many people except Homer's dad, until his dad finally sees his son for who he really is, seeks him out and blesses him.

October Sky is based on a true story. Homer Hickam went on to work for NASA where he helped train Space Shuttle crews. Because people in his life saw his potential and sought him out and encouraged him, he went on to live a different life than he otherwise might have lived. God invites us to learn to cooperate with His Spirit and seek people out and speak words of blessing into their lives.

Finally, the fifth stream flows right out of the heart of God. I have spoken so much about this stream of Christian discipleship that I'm not going to add anything today. Our God is a God who is on mission in our world and He has a church that He is inviting to join Him in what He is doing in the world. What place, what person, what community is God putting on your heart today?

Our God is a servant and He is calling you and me to a life of self-sacrificing service. How will we cooperate with the Spirit of God and live a life that increasingly demonstrates God's generous heart of love for the world?

Jesus said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water." The Spirit of God is very powerful and it is our job to learn how to cooperate with God's Spirit as we grow in all five of these areas of Christian discipleship. It will be an exhilarating adventure to learn how to cooperate with the Spirit. Yes, we'll probably flip our kayaks in this river of living water but the Spirit of God Himself will be our Guide and Teacher. And this journey begins and ends and is fueled by prayer.

So will you pray with me through these five streams of discipleship? Mercy, Humility, Anger, Seeking, Service.