

**Northern Lights Presbytery  
Sunday, October 2, 2011  
Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost – Year A  
marking River Sunday which is the  
Fourth Sunday in the Season of Creation**

*also possibly*

**Worldwide Communion Sunday**

\*rise in body or spirit

**HEAD WATERS**

**Prelude**

**Welcome, Announcements and Celebrations Jar**

**Quiet Preparation While the Worship Candles are Lit**

**Introit** 7 MV Gather Us In, Ground Us in You **OR**  
411 VU O God We Call

**Opening Prayer**

In holy presence we gather:  
We move into the waters of God:  
deep silent pools,  
loud rushing rapids,  
strong steady rivers –  
as those whose life flows from God.

We lift our voice with the voice of rivers:  
acknowledging our many sources,  
seeking outlets for sharing our gifts,  
borne up by the current of Spirit toward hope.

We listen with the waters  
for covenanted words and signs,  
that we may trust and work toward  
God's promises with courage freed from fear.

In holy presence,  
immersed in holy waters,  
we gather to worship.

**Prayer of Jesus**

**\*Hymn** 3 MV River **OR** 267 VU Like A Mighty River Flowing

**Prayer of Confession**

Our bodies, so science tells us, are mostly water. Our planet, as we can see on a globe, is mostly covered with water. Water is life, and life is water.

**Thank you, God, for water's gift.**

Earth's waters form the core of one of our sacraments. So would we, before anointing the head of a child or immersing a youth or adult with and in such water, feel free to place sewage in it – or to squander its gift so there is not enough for some? Yet, this is what we have done, too often, to water.

**Forgive us, God, for water's abuse.**

In parched land, water may restore life. In treatment plants, water may be restored. There is hope. There is, in God and in one another's care-taking, the possibility of water, and lives, healed. Let healing and restoration be our aim, even as it is our very source and hope of life in Christ.

**Let your rivered Spirit flow, God, in water's healing and in creation's renewal.**

**Words of Assurance**

Rivers are made for flowing free –  
and so are our lives.

May God's forgiveness  
and transformation  
and vocation

flow through us and flow from us,  
bringing life to us and all.

**Response 90 MV Don't Be Afraid OR**  
958 VU Halle, Halle, Hallelujah

### FLOWING

#### Learning with Children

*This reflection with the children is written in both directions and in a script that can be used. My suggestion would be to read it over a few times and then try to make it your own so that it is more of a conversation than the reading of someone else's script!*

Using a globe (preferable) or an atlas, point out some of the big rivers on the earth. Make special mention of some Canadian rivers – we have some good ones: Mackenzie, Red, Fraser, Thompson, St. Lawrence, Saskatchewan, Saint John, Ottawa (pick some of your favourites). Invite the children to name some of their favourite rivers, or rivers that they have visited. Using the globe or atlas, point out that rivers flow from high ground (mountains) to the oceans, but on their way they provide many different benefits to the people who live near them: transportation, fresh water, fertile soil. If you fly over a river you can often see patterns in the land around them that show where they used to be, but the water cutting into the banks has changed their course, creating lakes, or new channels, depositing sediment in some places and washing it away in others. Living near rivers can also be dangerous as many people discovered in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Quebec this spring – when the rivers overflowed their banks. Some folks wonder why people build houses close to rivers, but the answer is that rivers give us many things, and most people on the earth live pretty close to rivers. The Nile river in Egypt has some of the oldest villages, towns and cities on the earth – and many of the oldest bible stories come from that part of the world. Show the Nile river on the globe.

Did you know that in the bible there are many different ways that describe what God is like. Some describe God as being like a person, or an animal, or a bird, or a spirit. What if God was like a planet – our planet – the earth? I think kids are better than grownups at imagining, so I think it might be not too hard for you

to do. So, if God is like the earth, then maybe it will make sense to say that the rivers are like God's veins and arteries – important elements – bringing life and change and freshness to our lives.

This is River Sunday in the season of creation, and so I like to think of the rivers on our earth – our planet home – as being the veins and arteries of God. How about you? Can you imagine that, even just a little bit? And if those are the veins and arteries of God, then we had better take care of them, don't you think?

**Hymn 48 MV Jump For Joy OR 411 VU Touch the Earth Lightly**

**Hebrew Bible:** Exodus 17: 1-7  
**Responsive Psalm:** Psalm 78 page 792 VU  
**Epistle Lesson:** Philippians 2: 1-13  
**Gospel Lesson:** Matthew 21: 23-32

**Reflection**                      Flowing from Gratitude to Grace

### TO THE OCEAN OF GOD

**\*Hymn 87 MV Water Flowing from the OR**  
308 VU Many and Great O God Are Your Works

#### Minute for Mission

**October 2 — To Love and Serve Others**

*“For God so loved the world, that [God] gave [God’s] only Son.” —John 3:16*

Mike thought he had it made. He had a great job and could afford to buy the things he wanted. He didn't have to worry about saving because he was an employee of General Motors.

Then came the global recession. People stopped buying cars, and General Motors entered bankruptcy protection. They laid off thousands of workers in Oshawa, including Mike. Mike couldn't find another job and soon found himself in debt, with nowhere to turn.

That's when Mike learned about the Gate 3:16 Outreach Centre in downtown Oshawa. The centre seeks to model the life of Christ by caring for those in need.

Services include a drop-in centre for people who are homeless; a drop-in or call-

in counselling service; a breakfast and lunch program; a clothing and footwear bank; a drug-prevention program; networking for housing; daily Bible-study and literacy programs; and a health-care program.

By modelling God's love for all people, the centre inspires dignity and respect for all who come through its doors. The work of the Gate 3:16 Outreach Centre is supported by your gifts to the Mission and Service Fund.

By supporting M&S, you help people like Mike find hope. Give generously. ***Together, we carry out the work of our United Church. Make a difference! Join the partnership! Support the work of the Mission and Service Fund today.***

*The first Sunday in October is known as Worldwide Communion Sunday. It is an opportunity for members of the Christian community to gather – if not physically, then certainly virtually and in spirit – in the sacrament of Communion, or as some Christians would say, in the Celebration of the Eucharist.*

*This order of worship includes a Thanksgiving Prayer of Communion **and** Prayers of the People. The intention is that you will use one or the other.*

### **Communion Option** **The Sacrament of Communion** **Invitation**

*My suggestion would be to use the call to worship on page 45 of the Summer/Autumn 2011 edition of Gathering. While it is written as a Call to Worship it could also be used as an introduction to the invitation to communion. If you don't have Gathering, please email me at: [pchynoweth@ssimicro.com](mailto:pchynoweth@ssimicro.com) and I will send it to you, along with an invitation to subscribe to Gathering!! You could then add the following:*

*This table is one that extends around the world as you've heard, but it doesn't belong to anyone person or congregation in any of the places that were named. It belongs to God, and God invites you to eat at this table as a member of the circle of God's people, as an*

*important part of the body of Christ.*

### **Passing the Peace**

*Let us share signs of love and reconciliation as we greet each other with the peace of Christ.*

### **Bringing Forward the Gifts**

*Offering and Communion Elements are brought forward*

**\*Doxology** 184 MV Ay, Ay Salidummay **OR**

541 VU Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow

### **The Great Thanksgiving**

God be with you

**And also with you**

Lift up your hearts

**We lift them to our God**

Let us give thanks to God

**It is right to give God thanks and praise**

We thank you O God

For all that is good.

We thank you for the gift of life

And for the gift of creation.

**We look with wonder to the sky at night**

**And marvel at the beauty**

**and the boundlessness of this, your creation.**

And we can imagine ourselves

on a speck of earth and water

spinning in the vastness

of all that you have made.

**And even so, we know**

**that you have named us and know us.**

**And that you love us all, created in your image.**

God, you call us to share  
your love for us with all of your creation.  
You call us to be hopeful prophets  
and faithful examples of your will  
for this world and all that it is made of.

**We raise our voices in joyful celebration.  
We sing with anticipation for your realm  
which is here now and yet to come.**

*(said or sung according to your tradition)*

**Holy, Holy God.  
God of power and might.  
Heaven and earth are full,  
Full of your glory,  
Hosanna, in the highest.**

**Blessed is the one who comes,  
Comes in the name of our God.  
Blessed is the one who comes,  
Comes in the name of our God,  
Hosanna, in the highest.**

**Be with us here today, God,  
as we remember the meal which Jesus  
shared with his friends.  
Let us remember the act of community,  
eating and drinking together,  
enjoying each others company,  
celebrating our uniqueness which  
becomes a oneness in food shared together.**

He took the bread and broke it,  
asking them to remember him  
through the symbol of the bread.

And he took the wine and filled up

a cup asking them to remember his new vision  
of God's love for us.

**God we offer to you this bread and cup,  
a symbol of our community together  
and a remembrance of the meal  
which Jesus shared.**

**We praise you, we bless you,  
we give thanks to you, our God.**

**Send your Holy Spirit upon us  
and what we do here,  
that we and these gifts,  
touched by your Spirit,  
may be signs of life and love  
to each other, and to all the world.**

**Through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
all glory is yours, God most holy,  
now and forever.**

**Breaking of the Bread and Filling of the Cup  
The Community Meal (*Communion is served*)  
Prayer after Communion**

We thank you God that you have refreshed us at your  
table. May these elements, which help to sustain us  
physically, also be spiritual food for us, as we share in the  
oneness of Christ. May what we have done here so put its  
mark upon us, that we may may be joined in the struggle  
for justice and peace and the bond of love, throughout our  
journey of faith.

***Option if there is no Communion***

**Prayers of the People**

Hear our prayers, O God, that rise up from and for the whole of

your creation.

We pray for rivers to flow free: rivers of grace that offer and receive forgiveness and welcome; rivers of fresh and refreshing water that quench the thirsts of dry throats or arid hopes.

We pray for wilderness and wilds to stand free: places on this earth that restore awe and wonder; places in our spirits where your Spirit leads us into the mystery of holy encounter.

We pray for land to harbour life: for the bearing of crops in fruitful and shared harvest; for the sheltering of those without home or place; for peace rather than blood upon the land.

We pray for forests and trees to grow: for roots sunk deep into soil that nourishes, for leaves to breathe back oxygen into this creation for the sake of life, the same prayer we raise for ourselves – to return life as we have freely received it.

Hear our prayers, O God, that rise up from and for the whole of your beloved creation.

**\*Hymn** 163 MV River Run Deep **OR** 4 VU God of All Places

**\*Commissioning and Benediction**

The rivers of Mother Earth are like the blood vessels of Gaia:

    flowing with life,  
    providing transport and renewal,  
    breaking down and creating new land forms.

They remind us that creator God is not static, but living:

    Creating **and** Creator .

Go and honour this creative spirit within you:

    creatures of our God, waterbabies of the earth.

Live in thanksgiving for what we have been given, honour the rivers that flow lively and the land they pass by, in this, our home.

**\*Choral Response** 32 MV Hallelujah **OR**  
974 VU Amen! Amen! Hallelujah, Amen!

**Flowing from Gratitude to Grace**  
**River Sunday – Season of Creation**  
**Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost – Year A**  
**Sunday, October 2, 2011**

**Let us pray:** O God, may these words or the spaces between them, help us to reflect on your will for us, your people. May the vision of a river flowing help us to absorb the creativity and wonder of your presence among us and may it enliven us into new ways of being followers of your way. Amen.

Last week I was flying into Yellowknife on one of the beautiful fall days we've been having lately. The clouds that were blanketing the sky in Edmonton feathered out somewhere in Northern Alberta and we were treated to a lovely 31,000 foot panorama of the ground below us. It's not always on a flight north that we get such a clear view of the land, so I was an eager observer of what lay below us. The most interesting land form was the Peace River. It meanders back and forth across Northern Alberta and in one particular spot it is clearly visible that over the centuries this river has had a number of different paths as it winds across the terrain. The view caused me to reflect back on a lesson from school – I can't recall what grade it was – when we studied rivers. I remember learning about the ways that rivers change their course over their lives, carving away land on an outside curve and often depositing sediment in the eddies and slower water of an inside curve. I remember photos and diagrams in my text book that

showed how this action can actually cause the river to change course when the cutting and depositing action works to cut away into a hairpin bend in the river, creating oxbow lakes when big bends are cut off. The fact that this had happened on the Peace River many times in what is probably a particularly flat piece of land was clearly visible from my six mile high perspective. I found myself wondering what it was like on the ground. What was clear to me as many different riverbeds from the past thousands of years would not have been anywhere near the same to someone standing on the ground, perhaps in an old river bed. I wondered how many years of action by the flowing water was represented in the clear patterns of old bends, oxbow lakes and ancient riverbeds. It was but another example to me of the way that perspective can change our impression of something, and an example of the miracles to be discovered in the normal processes at work in the world. There is enough interest and fascination for me in the wonder-ful but explainable actions in the world to satisfy me for several lifetimes, without having to even think about miracles that defy explanation.

The Season of Creation is new for me this year and relatively new for the growing number of church denominations that have begun to adopt it as anywhere from a series of themes to follow in the month of September to its designation as a new Season in the church year complete with liturgical colour (orange) and new readings and names for each of the Sundays in the four

weeks that have been designated. One of the things for which I am very grateful in this Season has been the opportunity to think about the earth in new and expansive ways. I've had a very fortunate life, having had the opportunity as a young person to travel to many parts of the world and in more recent years of ministry to spend time in some of the most interesting and beautiful places that our country Canada has to offer, namely the town of Jasper in Jasper National Park in the Rocky Mountains and now in the rugged beauty of Canada's sub-arctic and in the vast panoply of rock, tree, rivers and lakes that make up the Canadian Shield – a geography which stretches across so much of our wonderful land. Shield country, Taiga, and Boreal forest are all names that have been given to the ecosystem in which Yellowknife makes its home.

As I've mentioned in previous weeks of this season, I expected that the Season of Creation would be a time spent in thanksgiving for the wonder and beauty of this our planet home. But it has been much more for me, and I hope that I've been able to convey at least some of this discovery in this the first time we've marked the season of creation. I look forward in coming years to exploring the themes suggested for the season in ways that deepen and expand our relationship with creation and Creator.

One of the ways in which I've been stretched in this season is in the direction of, for lack of a better term, repentance. I've been drawn beyond an attitude of thanksgiving, into a more edgy

relationship with creation, recognizing not just the abundance with which we've been blessed in creation, but also the ways in which human beings are having an effect and influence on the earth beyond the magnitude of our presence.

When people first started heading into space, and eventually to the moon, from the photos we received, we quickly realized that not much of humanity's doing is visible from very far out. I think I heard once that the Great Wall of China and some other human created landform were the only things that could be seen on earth that suggested there were humans living on the planet. That's kind of reassuring in one sense, but also a bit disappointing. What is even more disappointing is that even though you cannot easily see what kind of impact human beings are having on the earth, we all know that there are many ways in which we are forever changing the environment in which we live. Whether it is taking the resources away from the earth and the earth's crust in our various mine and drilling operations or burning up carbon and creating a warming blanket in the atmosphere, leading to any number of climate change occurrences – ranging from the melting of polar ice, to changes in weather with more extreme events, to the reduction of the so-called lungs of the earth through the removal of forest cover, we know that there are many ways in which we are not being good stewards of this home we have been given.

I live in a place where population density is extremely low – perhaps one of the lowest numbers on planet earth, so it is easy to see the land as big. A twelve hour drive from Grande Prairie to Yellowknife helps to reinforce the sense that we live in a vast land, but when we can see the famous “blue planet” photos taken by Apollo program astronauts and see our planet earth as a finite circle sitting as a speck in an infinite universe, the earth, our planet home does not seem so large at all.

And so into this dance between gratitude and confession, thanksgiving and repentance we turn our focus to the rivers of planet earth. I realized as I prepared for this week in the Season of Creation that I am in a kind of love affair with rivers. Perhaps it is because until age twelve and a few years between fourteen and eighteen I spent most of the summer months of July and August living at our cottage next to a river. I remember at the time kind of wishing that our cottage was on a lake like most of the other cottage dwellers I knew. Lakes seemed so much better, you could water ski and have fancy and fast boats, or even spend some time as a young teenager dreaming about and designing my own speed boat (and it only ever was a dream!) But we lived on a river, not only that but a stretch of river that was confined to about a five mile stretch with a dam and waterfall at one end and a waterfall and dam at the other end with our own so-called “natural dam” at our spot in the middle of this stretch of river. It was beautiful and

swift and rich with history. My great grandfather used to drive logs down that river to his sawmill at the downstream end where the dam and waterfall were located. He had to blast away the natural shelf of rock that crossed the river right where our cottage was located, because the logs would get caught up on this “natural dam”. I still remember seeing the pile of blasted rocks on the riverbank with the holes that had been drilled for the dynamite charges in them. I would look at them and try to imagine what it looked like before the blasting had occurred. The result was a beautiful little rapids – a source of great fun for us after we became strong swimmers and a source of enjoyment for us as we watched many canoe trips from upstream summer camps come down the river and attempt to shoot the rapids.

This love affair, while many years old, is only this week realized – as I was encouraged into reflection by the designation of River Sunday. Rivers, perhaps more than anything else on this earth, along with the turning of the seasons, are signs of the living, changing nature of the earth. The oceans too, with their waves and tides, but rivers flow – sometimes urgently, sometimes too urgently and sometimes slowly, lazily, barely moving - thus giving character, and reminder of the urgency of life and also that life can be a slow moving existence for some people and in some times. Rivers influence the land on which they run – carving out new directions as the years and eons pass, as my flight across the Peace

River last week so clearly pointed out. Rivers are not only a metaphor for life, they are life – running with water that should be fresh, if only human beings could be more conscientious about keeping them that way, a kind of cleansing flush of fresh and pure water from the mountains and high places into the seas and oceans which comprise the majority of our place, making new land as they go, fanning out in delta form, creating fertile beds of soil on which plants and humans can thrive.

Do you like me, love rivers, the bold, and mighty ones like our Mackenzie, South America's Amazon and Africa's Nile and the little ones that provide companionship for summer cottagers, transportation for eager explorers (as they did in this land a few hundred years ago), and source of life for so many of the world's people?

As I've alluded to already on this River Sunday – I've come to understand the rivers as the blood vessels of our God, coursing with life, vital to our existence, susceptible to our wasteful and profligate ways.

Did you hear this past week about the river in Washington State that is being restored back to the way it was over one hundred years ago? A dam is being removed – it's not a simple process, it has to be done slowly and deliberately so that the rush of water and sediment does not destroy everything downstream,

but as I heard the news stories, I could not help but detect the voice of hope and excitement as the people who live in the catch basin of this river look forward to see what this change will do and as they dream about a return to the way things used to be. Of course, one hundred years of sediment will have changed things, but still it was good to hear of the wonder being expressed as the plans proceed.

Love rivers and you can't help but love God – that's the message I was being given this week. Love rivers as a sign of creating God – signs of life, change, flow and renewal. Treat rivers well and you can't help but be good stewards of everything else. Love rivers and their power, and urgency and beauty and liveliness. Love rivers and be open to a feeling of gratitude for the work of Creator God. Love rivers and be led to grace, in response to the forgiveness God offers us for the ways in which we misuse that with which God has blessed us.

I want to close with some final connections to the scripture passages that we heard today. The first is probably pretty obvious. The Hebrew people aren't exactly happy campers. Sure they are free from the oppression of Egypt but not from the oppression of hunger and thirst. Last week we heard how their hunger was satisfied and this week Moses is led to a discover about how to slake their thirst. Not exactly a river, but the watery connections are pretty strong and deep.

The other passage we heard this morning is perhaps a bit more surprising – the parable of the brothers who both did not do what they said they would do. I wonder how often that mirrors the way we treat the earth. Does farmer God ever ask us to help out in the garden? Do we ever say we don't have time or energy or inclination, but then find that we are drawn to it? Or do we ever say we will, but other things, or better things, or lack of will stop us? I expect we can all reflect on those times. Where does God's grace fit in this story?

Finally, let me tell you about one time in my life when I was just about sick of rivers. It was General Council 34 in 1992 in Fredericton. I still remember when I first met the Saint John River – a wonderful serendipitous moment in my life. How come no one ever told me about how beautiful this river was? I seemed to be always asking myself this question as I drove for a couple of days, drinking in the beauty of New Brunswick as a heretofore undiscovered gem. That was about 1984. But in 1992, I returned to New Brunswick on fairly short notice as a surprise commissioner to the General Council. One of the theme scriptures for that General Council was Psalm 46. Every day at the start of our day, our worship time would begin with this phrase from the Psalm: There is a river... it was great for the first few days, but as the ten days wore on it started to be a standing joke with many of the commissioners, as we mockingly quoted that phrase to each other,

not because we didn't appreciate the psalm, but simply because it became so familiar to us that some of us were getting a bit tired of it. But then there was the end to General Council – always a bittersweet time, because so much pride in our church denomination can be created and some very deep relationships can be forged there in a short time. I was one of the early ones to leave, and the plane I was on was full of other commissioners. I don't recall much of the flight home except that when we took off from the Fredericton airport, and I checked it out on Google Maps just to make sure my memory was not deceiving me, we very quickly after leaving the runway crossed the Saint John River – only a few hundred feet above it and banking hard so that we could look straight out the window at the river. Some wit in one of the front seats of the airplane, yelled out in a voice loud enough for the whole plane to hear, “There is a River...” to a chorus of healing laughter as we headed up, up and away, back to our homes.

Finally, it is no surprise to me that the rivers abound in the scriptures, for many reasons – because of the vitality they represent for us, for the place of community for so many of earth's inhabitants, because, because, because – and it is no surprise that we can find beautiful, meaningful, poignant, stirring phrases like this one, a verse that has been quoted by much greater preachers and orators than me, but regardless of who says it, it tells us what is the common desire of God and us as God's people: Amos 5:24:

But let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. Amen.