

Scripture: Psalm 1:1-6
Message: Nourished for Life
July 9, 2017; Bethel CRC, Brockville, ON
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Step with me to the bank of a river. It can be any river: the mighty St. Lawrence River or Jones Creek. Or it can be Cameron Creek in Waterton National Park in southern Alberta. Stand with me at the side of this river and take a look at the flowing water. What are you going to do on the bank of this river? What are your options?

You could stand on the bank and simply look at the river. You can watch the water flow past. You can admire the speed if it is a fast-flowing river. You may marvel at how quickly the surface changes as the water rushes past. Or you might relax as you watch the lazy water quietly flow by.

Another option you have is to step into the river. You could let the water swirl around your feet. You could watch the changing currents as it flows past your legs.

Depending on how deep the river is or how fast it is flowing, you could walk through the river to go to the other side.

Or you could choose to swim in the river. You could lower your body into the flowing water and let it surround you and wash over you.

Again, depending on how clean the water is, you might choose to take a drink from the river. You might be thirsty and the river provides the nourishing refreshment that is desired.

A river. Many options.

I choose the picture of a river because it presents the choices of life that are before us. We might think of our lives as a river. Life does not stop. It keeps on going/flowing. For some of us, it seems to be rushing by. Our schedules are so full, there seems to be no time for anything else. Unexpected surprises or changes bring a sense of chaos into our lives.

Or we see life as something to be endured until we are finished. We are just pilgrims on this earth, just passing through. The river, this life, does not mean so much except to be something we have to tolerate to get through the other side. As we go through the river, or go through life, there are times when the current is not very strong and life is easy. There are other times when we slip on wet rocks or the current seems to make us lose our balance. But somehow we get back on our feet and keep moving across the river. As long as we keep the other shore in front of us, we will eventually get there. But the focus is on the other shore, not

on the river streaming around us.

For some of us, life is just coasting along, slow and smooth, like a quiet, lazy river. We just let it happen and nothing too disturbing stirs the water.

Or we stand on the side and watch. We let life happen and don't involve ourselves too much.

Or we might feel like we are in the middle of the river, perhaps kayaking against the stream or enjoying the refreshing water, the challenges of wading or swimming or boating in the current flowing around us.

Today, and during the weeks of this summer, I invite to pause and take a look at who you are and what is going on in your life. What is important....and is that a good thing to be giving priority? What are you busy with....and is that where God wants you to be? Where are you going with your life....and is that where God wants you to go?

I am thankful to have had the opportunity to ask myself and reflect on these questions during my recent sabbatical. It's important to take time to pause and reflect: What is important? What are you busy with? Where are you going?

Psalm 1 speaks of making choices that have eternal consequences. The choices we make in our lives affect the paths we walk, the direction of our life, and our eternal destiny. We are not simply blobs of breathing flesh that exist for a short time and then disappear. We are a special creation of God, crowned with glory and honour (Psalm 8:5b).

As that special creation, we can make a choice as to how we will respond. We can choose to ignore the Creator and act as if he does not exist. We can deny the Creator and his work in this world. We can live by our own choices and priorities, as if I am the one who determines my destiny.

Or we can live in relationship with this Creator. We can hear his invitation to walk with him. We can listen to his voice, as the voice of a shepherd leading his sheep. We can honour and obey his direction.

Psalm 1 describes these two choices or two paths: There is the tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. And there is the chaff, the husk around a kernel of grain, that is dried out and blown away by the wind.

Today, and over weeks of summer, take a close look at the path that you are taking with your life. Or to go back to the analogy of the river, the invitation and challenge is to take a

close look at our view of the river of life and where we are in relation to this river. How is our path, our presence in the river of life, expressing the purpose God has for our lives? Do we know what that purpose is? Are we living the purpose God desires or intends for us?

It's a very basic question: What does God want? How much of my life does God expect me to live for him? We might think that life is like a pie with all of its different parts. You've got your career life and you've got your social life and then you've got your marriage life and you've got your sex life and you've got your recreation life and you've got your retirement life that you're planning for. And one section of the pie is your spiritual life. That's where God comes in. God is a piece of the pie, but only one piece alongside many others.

No. God says, "I want the whole pie. I want it all." God is in every part. Psalm 1 does not speak of several paths, one of which includes God. There is nothing in our lives that does not belong to God. We walk with God in *every part* of our lives, or we don't truly walk with God. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27). All. Nothing halfway. No keeping things for ourselves. Our whole life is God's.

Earlier in the service we spoke words from the Heidelberg Catechism where we claim that this is a source of comfort. "What is my only comfort in life and in death? That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ."

The truth is that, if we belong so completely to Jesus and find comfort in that, we also have to surrender everything to Jesus. We cannot give the Lord a part of our lives and keep the rest for ourselves.

In what part of your life are you saying, "Me first" to God? You can be Christian and still be saying, "Lord, *me first*....Lord, I'll live for you but let *me first* finish my studies... God, I'm going to really do what you want me to do, but let *me first* get married...God, I'm going to really get involved in ministry but let *me first* get the kids raised... Let *me first* achieve financial independence... Let *me first* feather my nest egg and make sure all my retirement is cared for... God, I will live for you but let *me first* answer this text on my phone...." When you say "Me first," God is not number one in your life.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."

Walking a straight path, the path where God is leading, is the path of God's blessing.

God wants you to walk that path, and he wants your whole life on that path.

What does it take to walk that path? What does it take to surrender everything to God? How do I give my whole life to God?

For one thing, it requires taking time to listen to God. This listening is through reading the Bible, praying, hearing God's voice through family and friends. This is not merely putting in the few minutes per day to cover some assigned verses. It is a discipline of tuning the heart to hear God's voice.

There are a lot of things that fill our schedules and shout for our attention. I have 'To Do' list that I refer to regularly. But if there is no time to remind myself that God is most important and my whole life is his, then all the other things on the 'To Do' list are worthless.

Listening to God. Tuning the heart and mind to hear what God is saying about your life, your purpose, your walk with him. It will take determined, disciplined effort.

Why bother? Why should I do it? "For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction" (Psalm 1:6).

OK, that's kind of blunt. Those are the options. We're either walking with God, or we're not. We are called by God to walk in his way, completely, body and soul, our whole lives. Which path are you on?

The desire and intention is that we pay attention in our lives to how we are growing in our faith and trust and surrender to the Lord. Are we coasting along? Or are we intentionally determined to listen to God? His Word may redirect us. It may confirm choices. It might reveal something new. It might affirm something we've known and believed for a long time. It will certainly help us to focus on the path God has laid out for us.

The Psalm speaks of the promise of blessing. The blessing is pictured as life and bearing fruit. That's a reminder that we do not live just to get a benefit for ourselves. We live our lives to be a blessing to others, that the fruit of the Spirit may encourage others, that the fruit of God's blessing may bring hope and peace into the lives of others.

The God of life nourishes our lives that we may bear much fruit to the glory of God. Drink deeply. Walk in the path of life.

Amen.