Dear Friends,

The prophet Ezekiel was in Babylon among the exiles, carrying in his heart the grief of a ruined city and a shattered people. For twenty-five years he had lived in captivity. Twenty-five years since his homeland had become a memory. Yet the flame of faith had not gone out. The windows of his soul were still open toward Zion. The psalmist once recorded, “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down; yea, we wept when we remembered Zion” (Psalm 137:1). Ezekiel knew that sorrow. He knew what it was to live beside foreign rivers while longing for the river of God.

Then, on the 25th anniversary of Jerusalem’s fall in 586 BC, God gave him a vision. He saw the glory of the Lord return. He saw the temple restored. And from beneath the threshold of the house of God, he saw water flowing. At first it was merely a trickle. Then it deepened. It ran eastward, down from the sanctuary, through the desert, toward the Dead Sea. And wherever the river went, life resulted. Trees grew. Waters were healed. Fish multiplied. Barren places became fruitful. And the word over it all was this: “Everything shall live wherever the river comes” (Ezekiel 47:9).

This was not just a vision of water. It was a picture of the life-giving stream of God flowing from his throne to the desolate places of the world including even the Dead Sea. This river did not arise in human ingenuity; it arose from beneath the throne of God. It was not manufactured by human enthusiasm, it was a river of grace. “He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Revelation 22:1). It issued from God Himself. “There is a river the streams whereof make glad the City of God.”

Ezekiel saw water flowing from the throne. His message is plain. The world is healed, people’s lives are touched, even the world of nature is restored, when we stand by the river of God and plunge right into its source. Wherever the river flows, the bitter becomes sweet; wherever the river flows, the barren place becomes fruitful; wherever the river flows, there is abundance.

The barren wastes are fruitful lands,

The desert blooms with roses;

when He the glory of all lands,

His grace and power discloses.

On the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, when the High Priest filled a golden vessel with water sent to the Pool of Siloam from the Gihon Spring then carried it up the hill of the city with great pomp and fanfare to the temple, and began to pour the water out, Christ cried with a loud voice, “If anyone thirsts, let them come to me and drink” (John 7:37). Here we see the source of the river of God: “proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” Christ is on the throne of God as a Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. In the temporal sphere, on the cross his side was pierced and from it poured out water and blood. The old hymn ‘Rock of Ages’ has the line, ‘Let the water and the blood from thy riven side which flowed’. That is what sets the world on a redemptive basis. The river of grace streams through every land and nation from the Saviour’s wounded side. Our redemption is applied and sealed to our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

The Cross of Christ also has cosmic significance, reversing the cause and consequences of the Fall, as the Welsh Revival of 1905 hymn puts it,

On the mount of crucifixion,

Fountains opened deep and wide,

Through the flood-gates of God's mercy,

Flows a vast and gracious tide;

Grace and love, like a mighty river

Pours incessant from above,

And God's peace and perfect justice

Kisses a guilty world in love.

The Spirit still gives life. Nothing and no one is beyond the reach of redemption. By God's grace and Spirit, "out of our innermost being (literally 'bellies') shall flow living water." The same goes for the 'belly' of the earth. Wherever the river flows, we shall live, and nature too will live. For "the leaves of the tree by this river's side are for the healing of the nations."

Almost the last words in the book of Revelation record the gracious call of the Spirit, "Whoever will, let them take of the water of life freely." In his hymn, 'Glorious thing of thee are spoken', John Newton writes,

Who can faint, when such a river

Ever flows their thirst t' assuage?

Grace which, like the Lord, the giver,

Never fails from age to age.

Each day in our lives, let us pause and step into this river of grace – this life-giving, life-maintaining, life-sustaining gift of God which is "free to all a healing stream flows from Calvary's mountain". Let us ask God to let it flow through each of us and throughout God's creation.

Every blessing, Rev John