

Proper 20, Year C
September 21, 2025

It was bound to happen at some point and today is the day: the New York Times' Spelling Bee has intruded upon my thoughts about the Lectionary readings. The word is confluence: the coming together, usually of two rivers or streams or channels; the flowing together of more than just one, as it were.

We just had a knock on our front door and opened it to a very tall and serene elder with his lady companion. He said, "The world is so full of hate and war. Do you think mankind will ever find peace?" As the sojourners walked away, my husband answered "I certainly pray that we will."

Confluence: As I'm puzzling over why I cling so tightly to this word, a spiritual comes to mind: *Peace like a river*. I need that flowing through me, and, indeed, will mankind ever find that peace?

There are as many opinions about what has transpired in the last few weeks as there are people in the world: everyone has his own set of lenses from which to watch what is happening. In a word, we each have an agenda. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul says supplications and prayers and intercessions and thanksgivings should be made for everyone. Everyone. We pray for our family members who are sick or suffering, but we are urged to pray for everyone, not just family but those we dislike or who dislike us; praying means repressing that dislike and seeing our "enemies" as God's creatures, however much they don't resemble us. But haunting our prayers these days like a shadow is the fear that we are praying for the right person and that the people we hang out with and want to continue hanging out with will be praying for that same person.

Peace like a river

Our collect this morning urges us not to be anxious about earthly things but to focus on things heavenly. I don't know about you, but I'm having trouble wading through the swamp of earthly entanglements: who's right, who's telling the truth, what is the truth? And our Gospel reading this morning didn't help: it seems to say dishonesty will be rewarded.

Dear God, I need peace like a river in my soul.

My faith tells me that God's still small voice is speaking through the earthquake, wind and fire but my hearing isn't so good these days. People are messing with my heart: there is a disconnect between my heart and my soul; I'm being told not to think, not to follow my heart. Just do what you are told, go with the flow, follow the leader. Profess Jesus Christ as your Savior, but be sure it's the correct Jesus Christ. And if you take exception with something someone has said or done, be sure it's the person you're supposed to criticize, otherwise you may go to jail; say whatever you must to

convince everyone around you that you are on their side. Just do whatever you have to do to save your skin.

What is this? Sixth grade? Wear the right clothes - in my day it was A-line skirts with matching Fairisle sweaters - have the “in” haircut (some variation on a Vidal Sassoon); for heaven’s sake, hide the real you, because if you aren’t who you’re supposed to be, you get tormented in the bathroom, beaten up in the locker room or sent to the principal’s office.

Peace like a river in my soul

What if Tyler Robinson’s motivation to murder Charlie Kirk was simply, “What about me?” It’s my turn to be famous; I wrote a prize-winning essay in the third grade and no one in my class noticed, my parents didn’t even care; I was the one that made that experiment work in the biology lab, and they got credit for it. What about me? Isn’t that what lands us in a ditch at the side of the road where people just walk by as though we are not there? But nowadays if you carry a high-powered rifle or sit in a place of importance, you can do something about your what-about-me moments: you can eliminate the competition; you can be the one up there on the stage.

Peace like a river

Here we are, in the midst of earthly things, trying desperately to think on all things Jesus: to love our enemies, to offer help and comfort to the orphan and widowed in Gaza and Israel, Ukraine, Los Angeles, Chicago and Memphis, Brandon and Middlebury; to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God. Things claiming to be truths are coming at us from every direction, spinning us around, diverting our attention from the true Truth: That we are - each one of us – God’s holy temple from which the river of life flows, the temple in which Jesus Christ dwells. We must not let hopelessness become our best friend, displacing Jesus in our hearts, in our minds and in our actions. We need to remember that Jesus is the source of life. Jesus is the Confluence where we all come together and in which all that is worst about us - anxieties, disconnects, malcontentedness, fears, what-about-me moments, disappointments, disgraces – all is washed away in Jesus’ blood which he gave so that we might live in peace together.

Peace like a river in my soul