

SECOND PRESBYTERIAN

Roanoke, Virginia

November 2, 2025

“The River’s Flow”

Psalm 46 (adapted for a *Call to Worship*), John 14:1-3

George C. Anderson

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ² In my Father’s house there are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.



Both when I read the words and when I hear them at the end of the movie, I am moved by the final paragraphs of *A River Runs Through It*.

It is evening, and Norman—now near the end of his life—stands in the Big Blackfoot River in the “[half-light of the canyon](#).” The light dances on water running over rocks, and Norman keeps company with his past.

He is alone. Though friends would rather he not fish by himself, but that’s how he prefers it—because, in truth, he’s not alone. “[Now nearly all those I loved and did not understand when I was young are dead](#),” he reflects, “[but I still reach out to them](#).”

Then the book closes with these words:

“[Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it. The river was cut by the world’s great flood and runs over rocks from the basement of time. On some of the rocks are timeless raindrops. Under the rocks are the words, and some of the words are theirs.](#)”



I am haunted by waters.”



Norman is haunted by waters, but I am haunted by this passage. It moves me because I know what it is for memories and voices to keep me company. Give me a quiet hour alone in the woods, or on the porch of my parents’ home in Montreat, and it takes no time at all for voices to find me. The voices—

- of a crowded childhood home
 - and the neighborhood I was free to roam,
- of friends formed at graduate school
 - and the many gatherings along the way,
- of those who walked beside me as I learned how to be a pastor,
 - and as I learned how to be a husband and a dad.

They speak to me still. The way I think, feel, and believe remains a conversation with them. Even people I never met nor knew about reach me—because they reached those who shaped me. Looking upriver, I can see how the current of my life flows from far upstream. I can only see so far, but the river flows from beyond the horizon.

Beyond memories reach are those whose lives and voices move toward me from places like Appalachia, England, Ireland, Sweden, and Ukraine—where my ancestors lived. The river that reaches me today is fed by tributaries that have flowed across generations and continents, carrying with them faith and failure, courage and cruelty, sin and grace.

And of course, I’m not only talking about myself. You know this, too. You can name the names and recognize the voices of those who helped shape who you’ve become. You can list the countries where ancestors once lived. And still, the river that flows to you is fed by tributaries you will never know—carrying the lives of those whose names are lost to history, yet whose currents still move within us.

We know that not every life or voice that flows to us is admirable or trustworthy. There is a lot of water in this river—some clear, some cloudy. It carries lies that were told, harm that was done, and wounds that are still healing.

And yet, *here* we are, standing in the river, worshiping God. Faith in God—the faith grounded in the self-giving love of Jesus—moves as a healing current within the river. Without its reconciling flow, it’s hard to imagine that any of us would be here today hearing these voices and praying the Lord’s Prayer that many of them prayed.



That’s what we acknowledge and honor on All Saints’ Sunday—the mysterious movement of God’s Spirit in the river’s flow, carrying faith to us, through us, and beyond us still.

In this service we remember those whose lives have shaped our faith—whose words and witness left an imprint on ours—helping us dare to believe

- that God exists,



- that justice and mercy matter,
- and that what was revealed in Jesus’ life and words,
 - his death and resurrection,
 - is so beautiful that we trust its truth.

Since we dare to believe what the psalmist proclaims—and what we echoed in our *Call to Worship*—that “**God is in the midst of the river**”—then we might imagine Norman’s river as something more than a metaphor of the past. It is the river of baptismal waters, with God’s grace flowing to us through others, from generation to generation, from birth to death, to life again.



Perhaps we should do as Norman does while fly fishing alone in the river and keep our focus upstream. All Saints’ Sunday is when we remember those we have lost, and there is something deeply pastoral about the peace Norman finds in spending time with those he did not fully understand but loves. I wouldn’t change a word of the book’s closing scene—it’s as perfect an ending as I’ve ever read.

But if Norman is haunted by the waters that reach him that evening, I can imagine another evening when his gaze shifts downstream—haunted by the thought that the river carries him to others: his grandchildren and their friends, and someday, God willing, their children. For both good and ill, he and all who shaped him will, in turn, shape those yet to come.

It’s a strange thought, but a true one: even those not yet born are already being formed. We are shaping the communities, the culture, the faith, and the stories into which they will be born.

That’s *sobering*—but not grim. In faith, it’s both responsible and faithful to keep our hearts open to the future as well as the past, because the Spirit’s healing and reconciling work flows both ways. We must forgive the people of our past even as we give thanks for them—because we know that someday, those who follow us will need to forgive us too.



And as we reflect on the rivers of memory and influence—those who have shaped us upstream and those we will shape downstream—one of the voices that reaches us is the voice of Jesus himself, flowing through John’s Gospel. When he tells his disciples, “**Because I live, you also will live,**” he is not speaking only of a future day, but of a life already flowing through them. The resurrection is not merely what happens after we die. It is what happens when the current of God’s life breaks into the present. It joins past and future in a living stream—calling us not only to remember those who flow to us from upstream, but to live now as servants of those downstream, those yet to be born.

Jesus comforts his disciples with the promise that he goes to prepare a place for them—but even more, that his Spirit will dwell within them now. To be a resurrection people is to live in the current of that coming world—

- to forgive,
- to create,



- to mend what is broken,

trusting that God's life is already flowing downstream through us. Every act of compassion, every choice for justice, every word of mercy—that is resurrection life spilling downstream.



So, on this *All Saints' Sunday*, let us see the river whole—past, present, and future joined together.

Let us celebrate a resurrection faith:

- tender enough to touch our grief with hope,
 - reminding us that those who are with God are still with us in the ways they live on through us;
- strong enough to keep us faithful to the harder but better way of Jesus;
- and encouraging enough to send us out so that God's love might reach others through us.

And let us honor the best legacy of those who shaped the best in us by caring for our families, our community, our church, our world... our earth—so that those who come after us may find a home more safe, just, and loving. May all we do flow in the current of God's life, carrying grace downstream to generations yet to come.



Benediction:

May the God who flows through all time—past, present, and future—meet you in the memories that shape you, in the love that surrounds you, and in the hope that carries you forward.

May the Spirit comfort you in grief, strengthen you for service, and remind you that those you have lost are not gone from the story of your life, but live on in the faith, love, and grace they have passed to you.

And may you go from this place walking in the river of God's life, carrying peace, mercy, and kindness to those yet to come.

And know that the grace, mercy and peace of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit is with you this day and always.

