

“The Source”

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Texts: Genesis 2b-14 and Job 28: 9-28

If I asked you, what do you remember about the story from Genesis 2 of the Garden of Eden, what would you say? I don't expect that you would tell me about the four rivers that flow out of Eden. Most people get caught up in all things human in the garden, and they forget about all things that make it paradise, including four rivers that flow out of the garden. Let's hear it again: A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

Of all the things we talked about in Sunday school about the Garden of Eden, I don't think we talked much about the rivers. It's kind of like humans today. We spend a lot of time talking about humans, and we miss what else is going on. But

most importantly, we don't understand the importance of the source, or the headwaters of rivers.

Daniel Cooperrider writes, "Rivers, by their very nature of having to begin somewhere, reflect to us the mystery of source...whether it begins as a spring or as snowmelt or as rain runoff, it also is its source." Source. The word source has many meanings, but they all have to do with origin, or issue. There is nothing behind source. Source is where a person, place, or thing originates.

Otsego County is the source of five rivers: Sturgeon, Pigeon, Au Sable, Manistee and Black. This is where these rivers begin (although a couple of them have other sources as well). I wanted to find the source in our county. Well, that's harder than you would imagine. I went searching for pictures of these five rivers, I must be honest, I never saw the headwaters of any of them...well, not up close. Thanks to the Kalembers for helping me get better pictures of the rivers than I had, as well as Jeff's lessons about the headwaters of the Au Sable in Otsego County. The truth is, these rivers impact our lives whether we know it or not, and they have for centuries. It's interesting to explore where these rivers find their source, and how it is that some flow to Lake Michigan, and some to Lake

Huron. So much to learn. What is the source of each of these rivers? What impact do humans have on these precious headwaters?

There is a critical question for us as well. What is our source? We might think of our parents, or their parents, or their parents, and so on. We might consider biology and how children are made. If we go back far enough, says our faith, we will find that our source is something more than we can name, something beyond the generations, something that is beyond description. This something, often thought of as a someone, is beyond our language, and yet we must use language to speak of the Source.

*When you go deep, following a winding river to its source,
you're soon bewildered, wandering a place beyond knowing:
cragged peaks towering above stay lost in confusions of mist, and depths
sunken away far below surge and swell in a blur.*

-Hsieh Ling-Yun (385-433), Translated by David Hinton

How is this any different from our ultimate Source? Sometimes our seeking for God becomes a journey in which we are sometimes bewildered, sometimes wandering a place beyond knowing, sometimes lost in confusions of mist... But the Source is there. It isn't going anywhere. I don't know if I'll get the chance to find the source of any of the rivers in our county as there are many barriers to finding some of them. But when it comes to God, I believe all of us can find this

Source – this “headwater -- if you will. The Prophet Job reminds us that humans search everywhere for this Source...this wisdom...but often they have trouble finding it because they look for it in the wrong places. We look among the craggy stones and the gold and the things of the world...okay...but God is the sum of those things and more.

Truth be told, the Source is not as hard to find as you might think. It’s a matter of turning inside to find the image of God within you. It means spending time in nature, and letting your mind and your heart wander with questions and ponderings of the earth and all that is in it. Yes, it is using your knowledge, but more than that, it’s a feeling...a presence...it’s a belief that there is something more. Call the source whatever name you need to in order to know the presence of One who is all in all. All around the world, people use rivers to begin to understand the Source of all. Here’s a sample (Cooperrider, p20):

The Nile, the Ganges, the Mississippi, the North Pole, even the Milky Way, with its four arms and its Chinese name as the Silver River of Heaven... In the Quran, the prophet Muhammed was also given the vision of the four rivers of paradise...we find similar riparian mythology in northern India, where another holy place, the Triveni Sangam, lies at the confluence of three sacred rivers. At the heart of holiness, it seems, at the source of the sacred, we find the joining of the visible with the invisible, the confluence of the manifest with the unmanifest, the real with the more-than-real.

Here is another little tidbit I learned while reading the book we're using for this series, as well as in my own search for our rivers' source:

The number four is a classic symbol of wholeness. Four represents everything. The four corners of the earth. The four directions of heaven. In a spiritual sense, the four rivers that flow out from Eden, visible and invisible, flow everywhere. All of life, in this sense, can be said to receive its life from paradise. This isn't to say that everything is perfect, of course, but like a drop of water becoming part of the river, everything has God's original perfection streaming through it.

That includes you. Doesn't mean you're perfect, either. But it does mean that God's original perfection is streaming through you. I wonder if we could begin to see this story out of the Garden of Eden, or if we'll forever be stuck in the other ones? I wonder if the four rivers will ever make the Sunday school curriculum, or will it always be about who came first, apples, expulsion and who's to blame? Like with many of our scriptures, we would be well served to look at the WHOLE thing.

In the name of the Source of all. Amen.