

River of Life

John 7

Peter Hiett @ The Sanctuary Downtown

June 19-20, 2010

This sermon is a continuation of the last three from John 6 and 7.
We've been talking about BAD will, GOOD will, and FREE will.

Today, in John 7, Jesus tells us about "The River of Life."

[Peter sings]

"I've got a river of life flowing out of me
Makes the lame to walk and the blind to see
Opens prison doors, sets the captives free
I've got a river of life flowing out of me

Spring up oh well, within my soul
Spring up oh well, and make me whole
Spring up oh well, and give to me (Give to ME. GIVE to ME!!!) that life abundantly"

A "river of life." I know that I'm supposed to have a river of life flowing *out* of me; but if I'm honest it seems like most of the time, I've got a river of ... something else flowing out of me.

You know, the Bible is a very honest book. Jesus was a profoundly honest man. Actually, He is the Truth. It's religion that comes along and dresses up God's Word with propriety and piety.

When Jesus talks about "rivers coming out" of us, I think He wants to think about "rivers coming out" of us. And to put it rather bluntly, the only rivers I see coming out of me are not life, but death. Yep. Pee and Poo.

And now, even as I said that, something in you probably recoiled, was shocked, and rather offended... offended at the words "pee" and "poo." Yet Scripture uses far more offensive words than that. And cursing, swearing, and filthy speech in Scripture don't have to do with vocabulary lists, but the truth and love in the words "pee" and "poo."

Perhaps you're offended at those words, or even more, the idea. We either ignore the topic of excrement, or make jokes about the topic in order to hide the topic. We're ashamed of the topic. And that's fascinating... 'cause what could be more natural or more obvious about us than that? But we obviously don't want to see it.

So anyway, if I'm honest, I don't have a "river of life flowing out of me." I have a "river of life flowing into me," called food. I have a river of life flowing into me, and a river of _____ flowing out of me. In John 4, Jesus said that he had "*food of which you do not know.*" His food was, "To do the will of the Father."

With this old body of mine – my flesh – I eat life (plant life or animal life) ... “Body broken and blood shed.” I eat life like a zombie or vampire (like we’ve been preaching). I eat life and I poo death. It’s like my nature, my desire, my will is to take credit, take glory, take life for myself, which produces death, shame, and resentment—like a river. And I don’t want to see it.

John 7:38 – “*Whoever believes in me ... out of his heart (literally ‘his belly, his guts’) will flow living water.*” “The water of life.” LIFE! What is life? Any honest biologist will tell you we don’t really know. We can’t create it; we can only describe it. It’s like individual entities, each willing a will greater than their own.

A molecule in my body is alive, ‘cause it wills the will of a cell of which it is a part of. A cell in my body is alive ‘cause it wills the will of an organ or body part it is a part of. My finger is alive, ‘cause it wills the will of my whole body – the glory of my whole body. Perhaps I am only alive if I will the will of something greater than me.

God said, “*The day you eat of it, you will surely die.*” My finger dies when it’s cut off from me, or when it wills to will something other than me. Then it becomes paralyzed or diseased or cancerous. And let me ask you: when is my finger most free? When it’s free of me, or attached to me and willing the glory of me? And see, the glory of me turns out to be the glory of my finger. It’s life.

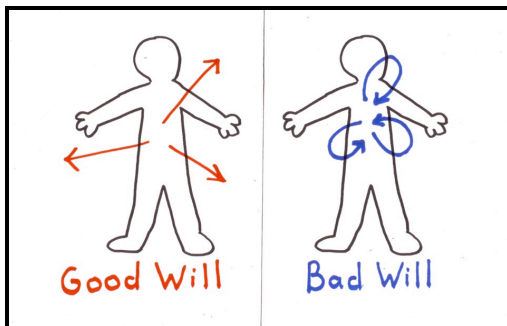
Well, I ingest life and turn it into my own life, but maybe I’m dead and no longer free. For, as we just established, life is to choose the glory of another. And I choose the glory of myself. So maybe, I’m like a finger, cut off from life. It looks alive, but it’s really dead. Or maybe I’m worse... not just dead, but the walking dead, and feeding on life and producing death – a monster.

John 7:17 “*If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God, or whether I am speaking on my own authority.*”

We preached on that last week. For several weeks, we’ve been talking about good will, bad will, God’s will, our will, and free will.

“The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory, but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.”

See, I think:



A bad will is a will that seeks its own glory, and that's death. It's a will that's turned in on itself, like a black hole.

A good will is a will that seeks a greater glory, and that's life. And you see, life is Love, and God is Love. God seeks God's glory, but God is not simply one enormous selfish Person. God is at least 2 persons ... we believe 3 persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And each of these persons glorifies the other. Three persons constantly glorifying the other, serving the other... like a dance, and that dance is Love, and Love is life.

A bad will seeks its own glory, and a good will seeks God's glory. Therefore, a good choice really doesn't have to do with what's chosen, but it has everything to do with the manner in which it is chosen. So there are an infinite number of steps that can be chosen in a dance, and yet they must all be chosen in rhythm with the music, and the music is Love.

Without Love, you are nothing, and your dance is nothing. The music is Love.

To dance, you don't control the music, the music must capture you, control you, romance you. You don't choose Love so much as surrender to Love when Love chooses you. And if you take credit for that choice, you're no longer dancing. As soon as you take credit for a good choice, it's no longer a good choice. As soon as you take credit for good will, it's no longer good will; it's bad will, for bad will is a will taking credit ... seeking its own glory.

Maybe that's why I, myself, can never simply choose the good once I'm bad. It's what Martin Luther called "The Bondage of the Will." If I am good, choosing the good would simply be being myself, unconscious of myself. But if I'm bad, I, myself, can't simply choose to be good. I can't simply choose to love, choose life. The good is to seek another's glory – God's glory. The bad is to seek my own glory. So if I'm already bad, and someone says, "You *should* be good" ... well, I'll seek another's glory, for my own glory... which isn't seeking their glory. It's pretending to seek their glory for my own glory – which really isn't glory, but death dressed up like life.

In other words, if I'm bad and someone tells me to "be good,"
I'll invent religion, become a Pharisee;
I'll pretend to love for the sake of hate;
I'll do evil and call it good;
I'll eat life and crap death; and
I'll become "*twice as much a child of hell,*" in the words of Jesus.

Or maybe I'll cry out, "*Oh wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*" Save me! God save ... *Yeshua* ... Jesus. Save me from what? Save me from myself.

And now, this is a profound mystery: but it's not simply my old self that cries, "save me from myself." It's not my self, but another self being born within me. My self can't save me from myself, or it's just more self.

My friend Wayne forwarded this video to me a few weeks ago. It's a fellow recounting a near-death experience. Now, it's not Scripture, but listen to what he claims to be saved from:
Interview of man sharing his near death experience:

The thing that really struck me the most was the complete absence of the awareness of time. I was traveling. I could feel that I was traveling and as I looked straight ahead, there was this pure white light. I looked ahead and it was whiter than the whitest snow and brighter than ten thousand suns, and I could look right at it and it was compelling. It was like I was being towed like a tractor beam.

As I was looking at it I could feel this anticipation but simultaneously I could feel, on my right side, I could feel something. I looked and it was this blackness, sweeping, now this blackness, as I looked at it, instantly I was aware of its complete nature. I used to never be able to say to anybody go to hell after that, because you wouldn't want Adolph Hitler, Osama Bin Laden, you wouldn't want any human being to ever go in there. It was so horrible.

As that was sweeping, it was eclipsing this light. So it was sweeping. It was like you're in a room, and you close the door and there's a little space between the door and the door jam. It was a real place that I was seeing and that I was feeling. And it was closing. And now I'm standing on the precipice of eternal separation and I scream, "I'm sorry, I want to live, give me another chance!" And just before that closed I was standing in the presence of Almighty God.

And instantly I know that this being who was off on this side of me, who I didn't see, but I was standing in this river of golden radiation. It looked like a moving river of golden light; it went that way and that way, and it was under me it was going right through me. This river was alive. For years I wondered what was that blackness and why did it sweep down like that and why did it shrink down to a sliver that was about a half inch away. Years later, God revealed it to me. It was really a historical record of my life. All those years that I had lived, I was in darkness and God gave me a space.

Now, I don't know about everything he says, but did you notice how the light shone in that darkness? And did you catch what he was being saved from? The darkness. And he said the darkness was "the historical record of [his] life." And isn't a life made up of choices (billions of choices) chosen with your will? His will was the void –outer darkness.

Think with me for a moment.

When God wills something, what happens? "All things." "Everything."

Ephesians 1:11 – *"He accomplishes all things according to the counsel of His will."*

When God speaks His Word, creation happens. And God's Word became flesh – His name is Jesus.

Well, if God's will is everything, then what is *not* God's will?

Nothing—the outer darkness—the Void!

Regarding her famous vision, Julian of Norwich wrote, "I saw that [God] does all that is done, and I was sure that God never sins. Therefore it seemed to me that sin is nothing." And yet, that nothing is like a horrific something – the void.

What is death, but the absence of Life?

What is a lie, but the absence of Truth?

What is darkness, but the absence of Light?

What is sin, but the absence of Love?

And God is Love, Light, Truth, and Life.

When we sin, when we seek our own glory, we seek to create ourselves, and all we create is an empty lie. We will ourselves into outer darkness and become outer darkness, empty void, and in bondage to sin and death.

People say we have the capacity to choose. Yes. On our own, we have the capacity to choose a particular body of sin and death.

That's how we create this body of sin and death – with our choices.

“We really must see that in ourselves, we are nothing at all but sin and wretchedness.” – Julian of Norwich.

To Catherine of Sienna, God is reported to have said, “I am He who is; you are she who is not.”

Anthony Demello asks, “Have you experienced your is-not-ness?”

Soren Kierkegaard writes, “Someone who is capable of nothing has every day and every moment the precious opportunity to experience that God lives.”

Maybe this sinful, old, self-seeking me is the empty place in which Christ is born, where the light shines in the darkness and God is revealed. Maybe God can not will sin, which means He cannot will nothing, which means He will not will “Not God.” Yet He does will that I encounter “Not God” – that is, evil... that having known “Not God,” I might one day love God in freedom ... that having known evil, I might one day choose the Good in freedom.

You see, that Good Choice in me is Christ born in me: Faith, Hope, and Love in me; the Word of God spoken into me, the void. So, *“It’s no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”*—the only Begotten begotten in me.

Maybe this old sinful me is a step in creating the Real Me, the one in God’s image, who loves God in freedom.

Ephesians 1:11 – *“He accomplishes all things according to the counsel of **His** will,” including me.*

Ephesians 1:12 – *“Predestined to live for the praise of His glory... Predestined to love God in freedom ... to seek His glory.”* We are predestined for free will.

Well, all of this is really hard to talk about. Maybe part of what makes this so hard to talk about now is that there are two wills occupying one space that I call “me.”

Paul writes: *“Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust (Adam), we shall also bear the image of the Man of Heaven (the Last Adam) ... Who became a life-giving Spirit.”*

It's like we each are that fallen man of dust, in bondage to a bad will.

[Peter pours a cup of dirt into a glass pitcher]

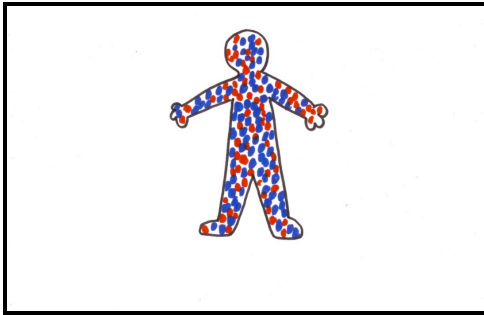
But when Christ sends His spirit, we experience good will.

[Peter pours a cup of water into a glass pitcher]

But now we are a mix. If I stress about that, I just stir myself up.

[Peter stirs the messy, muddy concoction.]

Now we are a mix:



We are bad will and good will, seeking our own glory and seeking God's glory. We have an old man that takes credit, and we have a new man that gives credit to the glory of God. If I try to sort them out – sift them, judge them – I do it to *my* credit, and I only become more dirty. I can't clean myself with myself; it only makes more of that old self. I, myself, cannot sort myself out.

And yet until I am sorted out, I'm not free. My will is not free; it's entangled.

I try to will myself out of that entanglement and I only get more entangled. A good will is a humble will. It doesn't seek its own glory. "Anxiety is entangled freedom," wrote Kierkegaard. It's deliberating about freedom: "I should seek God's glory, to my glory. I should be free. *Should*. So I'm not free, yet I should still be free. I should be humble. Hey, I'm humble! Crap, I'm not humble."

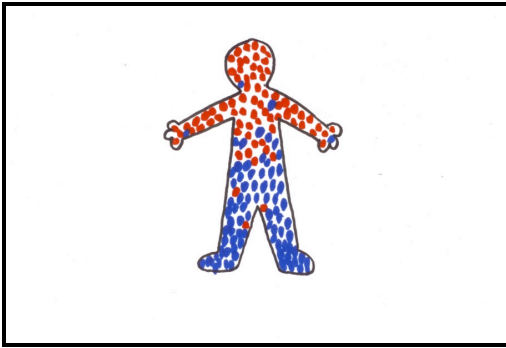
Kierkegaard writes:

"Freedom really is freedom only when in the same moment it rushes with infinite speed to bind itself. Freedom is the choice whose truth is that there can be no question of any choice, emphasizing freedom of choice, focusing on my choice, as such, means the sore loss of freedom."

See? It's the musician who doesn't deliberate about each note who plays in freedom; it's become his nature. It's the dancer who doesn't consciously choose each step who dances in freedom. So I can't will myself into freedom, judge myself into freedom, deliberate myself, and *should* myself into freedom. I have to, like, surrender myself into freedom.

You know, if I just let this vessel of dust and water sit ... and if I just let my heart sit before Jesus ... maybe the dust will start to separate from the water. Maybe I'll see my bad will separate from good will ... God's will.

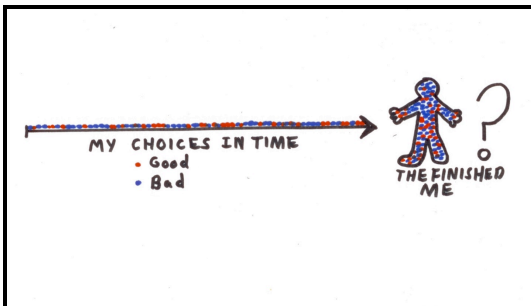
Kind of like this:



I see my bad will in light of God's good will when I stop – "*Shabat ... Sabbath ... Do Nothing*" before Him. Well, if I just see it, perhaps I'll stop hiding it. Perhaps I'll confess it, 'cause I can't seem to fix it. And perhaps that's the Living Water already beginning to bubble up in my soul. If it turns into a river, it will wash me ... wash me from inside out, and connect me to eternal life... like a body part is connected to the body with a river of blood.

Through Jeremiah, God says, "*My people have forsaken me, the Fountain of Living Waters, and have made themselves cisterns.*" A cistern is a dammed river. A dead heart is the same thing. It's the Grace of God that breaks your cistern.

Well, I can think of two wills in one space that is me, and I can think of two wills on one time line that is me – or that I think is me.



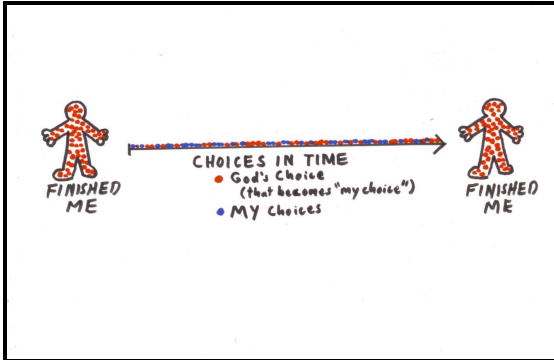
We think a person is like the sum total of their decisions in time: I chose to marry Susan; I chose to study and get a degree; etc. Now, most of those were bad ... my will. I was seeking my own glory. But maybe some were good... my will was God's will and to His glory. We think a person is the sum total of these choices, and we still have a bunch of choices we have to make in order to make ourselves into the person we're going to be.

Well, Scripture says that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And John says we will be like Him, and He's finished already. Paul writes that we are "*already seated in the heavenly places with Christ.*" Like already who we eternally are. John saw the New Jerusalem coming down, and he himself was part of that New Jerusalem – finished already.

When Jesus meets folks, it's like He sees them not as they are, but as they will be... or perhaps forever are, finished already. Like Peter is eternally The Rock, and only for a moment a coward. Mary Magdeline is eternally The Bride, and only for a moment a whore. And yet, that moment

reveals that she is a bride forever by Grace... forever by God's choice. And seeing it, that choice becomes her choice.

Well, we think we will forever be the product of our choices in time. But what if our choices in time are the product of the person that we already and eternally are?



What if God, like, willed us first, and created all space and time second?

Ephesians 1:4-5 – God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world... He predestined us ... according to the purpose of His will."

Well, if God willed us first and created time second, then you can't create yourself with your choices. You can only create a false self, a sinful self, an empty self, a lie. If God willed us first and created time second, you don't create yourself with your choices in time. God has, like, already created you, and is giving to you, your choices in time.

Then, every good choice in time is an agreement with eternity, and every bad choice is a rejection of eternity ... reality ... heaven ... the rejection of eternal life – your eternal life. And yet *even* if you will yourself out of your own good story, your will is not stronger than God's will; and it is His will to will you back in and reveal the wonder of His Grace.

You see? Our story is a Love story ... a Romance. So God even descends into our nothingness to reveal His Grace. So even our bad choices reveal His Good Choice – Jesus. On the cross, He cried, *"It is finished."* Scripture reveals He was slain from the foundation of the world. At the cross you can see eternity – Beginning and End. Even your bad choices are consumed by His Good Choice.

I know that's all confusing, and maybe I didn't say it quite right.

But this is my point:

If I think I must create myself with my choices, I try to create myself in fear, with works of flesh according to laws. I seek my own glory. I sin. I consume life and excrete death.

But if I believed that God had already created me, and *"it is finished,"* and that He had chosen me and predestined me in Love ... then maybe that thirst to glorify myself would be satisfied. And seeing the glory that glorifies me, I might choose to glory Him in freedom. I'd have no need to glorify me, but might *want* to glorify Him. And that's the

River – If I see my bad will, and I can see His Good Will; and that makes Good Will flow from me.

At the cross, Jesus cried, *“It is finished.”* I think He means “everything is finished,” because He tells us: *“This is the judgment of this world.”* It is the Right Judgment, which is Grace. I am to judge all things with His Grace. I am to see myself and all things judged by Grace and finished by Grace.

Now, let’s finish Chapter 7.

“Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.”

Some of the people of Jerusalem therefore said, “Is not this the man whom they seek to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, and they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ?”

They know about Jesus, but don’t really *know* Jesus. There are 2 different Greek words in this paragraph, both translated “*know*.” Then Jesus reveals: they may know about Him (the Greek word *aida*), but they don’t really know Him (*ginosho*), or know God. They judge Jesus by “appearances,” in bondage to their own will. Now, all this happens at the Feast – the Feast of Booths.

Remember, the Feast of Booths commemorated Israel’s journey from bondage to freedom, and it commemorated the Harvest. Faithful Love in freedom is the harvest of this journey. For seven days, Israel celebrated an elaborate water-pouring ceremony in the temple. It commemorated the water from the rock, which followed them in the wilderness, and the water from the heavenly temple in Ezekiel’s vision.

The priests would march the water around the alter, while the choir sang, *“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His Love endures forever.”* On the last day, they marched around 7 times, and the worshipers cheered and waved their palms.

Verse 37:

On the last day of the feast (the 7th day or the Sabbath day), the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart (or his belly) will flow rivers of Living Water...”

“As the Scripture has said.” Well, Scripture didn’t actually say that. It said out of the Rock (which turned out to be Christ) flowed a river of Living Water, and it said out of the True Temple flows a river of Living Water. Jesus seems to think we are a temple, and He will live there, with Living Water flowing from Him and out of us.

Verse 37:

Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believe in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been (flowing, or) given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

In John's Gospel, Jesus is glorified, enthroned on the cross. And on the cross He "delivers up" His Spirit. A river of life – His Good Will.

In John's Revelation, John sees the New Jerusalem that is also himself, and in it the throne of God. And from it, "the river of Life," and on each side of the river and in its midst, he sees the Tree, the "Wood of Life" ... "The *Skulon* of Life" ... "The Cross of Life." One tree.

It's like the river is flowing down a tree – a cross. A river of Life is blood; the life is in the blood. The fountain was opened on Christ's tree, and it is predestined to flow from our hearts. That River is the Grace of God, the Free Will of God, the Good Will of God–Love.

Pop Quiz:

On the cross, what flowed into Jesus?

All our bad choices: Our bad will, our sin, our death, our waste, our hell.

And what flowed out of Jesus?

God's Good Choice: His good will, grace, His life, His creation,
His Kingdom–Love.

And love changes us.

For the rest of chapter 7, people judge Jesus, seeking their own glory, unable to see Jesus. At the start of chapter 8, they throw a woman at Jesus' feet, caught in the act of adultery. Adultery is consuming life and excreting death; it's bad will. They throw her at Jesus' feet and ask Him to judge her. Laying still before Him (she didn't speak, didn't run) – *Shabbat... Stop ... Sabbath* – her heart must have been sifted and revealed, like the mud in the pitcher.

But Jesus doesn't condemn her. He condemns condemnation: "*Neither do I condemn you.*" That is his judgment. It's like He didn't even see the dirt. Perhaps He wanted her to see... to see the dirt, so she could confess the dirt. But He didn't see the dirt. Or, seeing it, He didn't count it as anything but a shadow, destroyed by Light – a lie destroyed by Truth.

He didn't see her as the product of her choices – a whore.

He saw her as the New Creation – His Bride ... His Choice.

He didn't see her as the product of her choices in time,
and THAT changed her choices in time.

He said, "*Go and sin no more.*"

I would imagine that everywhere she went, she sought God's glory, because she wanted to.

Jesus eats death and excretes life. He eats bad will and oozes Good Will. It's called forgiveness, and "forgiven much, we love much," and forgive much. In other words, we eat bad will and excrete Good Will: The River of Life.

Communion

For on the night that Jesus was betrayed (given up) He took bread and He broke it saying, "*This is my body given to you.*" And in the same manner, after supper, He took the cup and He said, "*This cup is the new covenant poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it all of you.*" And Scripture over and over again tells us the life is in the blood.

See what's happening? You are the woman caught in the act of adultery. Now, thrown at the feet of Jesus, let Him expose your bad will so He may reveal His Good Will. Then, His Will will become your will: the River of Life in you. You're His Bride. He aims to give birth to life through you. One day it will fill the whole world with glory. But even now, even here, it's bubbling up in you.

Come to the table and worship

Benediction

A River of Life... And this He said of His *Spirit*.

Now, I've seen the Spirit of God do the most amazing things. I mean, it grew one of my legs out. It's so freaky weird. I don't know how to describe it. I mean, I've seen the Holy Spirit heal people, empower people with gifts and wonders. And yet, according to the Gospels, all those things are just signs. They are not the Substance. They are not the Power. They're signs of the Power, they're not substance of the Power.

And it's Father's Day, so I kind of want to tell it to you this way, ok? My wife says I shouldn't say this, so...if it bothers you, filter it out. But I think it's this ... He gives us the power to do this:

In my flesh, what do I do? I eat life and I excrete ... something. There's a name for that something that I think is very appropriate. It's a name that I think Scripture uses a lot, that gets translated out. God gives me the power, Jesus gives me the power to eat crap and excrete life. That's called forgiveness—the power of forgiveness.

In heaven, everyone bleeds His blood into each other, and it's a great dance, but in this world, we're at war. And the weapon of our war is forgiveness. So, may you believe the Gospel, and forgive. In Jesus' name and under the authority of His blood, Amen.

Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.