

# Church Is Like A River...

## By Pastor Charlie

One of my mentors – a kind and wise old friend – once famously said to me, “Charlie, a church is like a river.”

Whereupon I brilliantly replied, “Huh?”

“Yeah, a river,” he said. “Walk along the banks of a river, and every time you visit it you FEEL as though you’re seeing exactly the same place every time and that nothing has ever changed – that somehow, you’re connected with eternity. But really, you never step into the same river twice. It’s always changing.

“The water that cools your feet today will be miles downstream tomorrow. It’ll be replaced by new water that is just as cool and every bit as refreshing. The water is always flowing – always moving – always creating new channels along the river’s banks.”

I resisted the urge to tell my friend that an Ephesian philosopher named Heraclitus had come up with the river analogy first – about 2,500 years ago. Instead, I kept listening.

“Yes, a church is like a river,” my friend said. “You sit in the pew on Sunday mornings, and you just know what to expect from the experience, rooted as it is in two millennia of history and tradition. We Disciples celebrate holy communion every Sunday morning because we’re pretty sure that’s what they did in the First Century church. We have held onto that tradition.

“Yet, things change. Members join, and they move away. Musicians write and sing new songs. We tinker with projection screens and other new tools that help to make worship better. Programs change. New groups form.

“Yet in the face of all the things that change, we hold onto God’s eternal truth – the one thing that never changes. We hold on tight to the scriptures and to our relationships with God, and those things connect us to eternity.”

Over the past year, I’ve had more opportunities than I’d care to admit to reflect on this conversation with my old friend.

Because of the pandemic, some days it feels as though we’ve not been allowed to leave anything unchanged. We wear masks. We space ourselves out. We use double-stacked communion cups for communion instead of our beloved intinction. We use recorded music. We’ve temporarily abandoned the use of Sunday morning bulletins.

We do these things for very good reasons. Yet when the river is flowing in an unaccustomed way and the current feels like an alien place, it's good to remember that you and I can depend on a few things that never change.

The scripture hasn't changed. Our reliance on God's grace remains the same as ever. Our love for God and for each other remains immutable; it will never change.

God's love for you remains unshakeable and is thoroughly dependable.

As we make our way through the remainder of this strange year, let us remember that we worship a God who will always be there for us. His love for you weathers any storm – and will never change.

Blessings on the journey.