

Reflection 13th September 2026

As always, just to let you know that Nick checked and OK'd this reflection, and I'm praying that the thoughts of all our hearts be acceptable to God. Amen.

Although I've read the correct Gospel passage for today, I'm ignoring it today, because it's about Forgiveness, and we'll hear plenty about that during October!

Today is the second Sunday of the season of Creation. The theme this year is "Living Water", based on today's Old Testament reading - a beautiful and poetic description of Ezekiel's vision.

Ezekiel was a priest and a prophet, and was among those exiled far from their homeland when Jerusalem and the Temple of Solomon were destroyed by the armies of Babylon about 600 years BC. In today's reading, Ezekiel describes his vision - the entrance of an idealised future temple. Water flows from beneath it, beginning as a trickle and becoming an ever-deepening river, flowing through lands once barren, transforming deserts, restoring fish, vegetation, and even bringing life to the Dead Sea.

Today, we might say "In his dreams!". As Nick mentioned last week, we can feel despair at the polluted state of many of our waters. We feel horror at the devastation, destruction and loss of life due to extreme flooding. Water can certainly take lives.

While acknowledging this, today, let's focus on **Living Water**.

This isn't one of my stories about my fictional church friend Morag, but if it were, then like many folk, I think she would feel an affinity

with water. She would find peace beside the North Esk river - watching the insects dance on the water surface, spotting fish gliding among the waterweeds, watching and hearing the water rush round rocks. She would love to spot a kingfisher darting from an overhanging branch into the pond at Valleyfield to catch it's dinner.

I think Morag would do a bit of research and discover that the North Esk starts as a small trickle somewhere up in the Pentland hills. She would see that it gathers more and more water on it's journey, eventually reaching the sea at Musselburgh as a large, wide river which has nurtured an abundance of life on its journey.

Morag would also love to go to an East Lothian beach and watch the waves break on a stormy day, and retreat before surging up again. On a warm day, she'd paddle or even swim in the sea. As she gazed to the horizon over the vast expanse of ocean, she would be humbled to think of all the life that the ocean sustains.

But my reflection today isn't just about Morag, It's about all of us.

Maybe the affinity to rivers and oceans which Morag and many of us might feel is because water is literally a large part of each one of us. Our bodies contains a lot of water - quite a lot more than half our weight. Water is a major part of our cells and the fluid around our cells.

Morag would be fascinated by this and would discover that, amazingly, nearly all of the water in our bodies is completely renewed within about 50 days on average.

If we live to be 90 years old, our body's water would be renewed more than 600 times.

So God's living water is constantly flowing slowly through our bodies. It's like we're forever renewed, refreshed, and cleansed.

Morag would find out that there is, and always has been, a finite or set amount of water on our planet and its atmosphere.

So every single water molecule in our body has already cycled through the Earth's environment for billions of years. Every water molecule has already been shared by countless animals, plants, and other humans before it's become a temporary part of our own body. Amazing.

Let's ponder and park this idea for a moment. I'd like to spend a few moments thinking about today's Epistle, and come back to Water of Life at the end.

Paul wrote the letter we heard today to the early Christian church in Rome, just thirty years or so after Jesus died.

I find that incredible. My mum died around thirty years ago - it seems no time at all! I can remember things she said and things we did together quite clearly.

Paul was contemporary with Jesus but never met him. But after his conversion, Paul met and spent time with key leaders who **did** know Jesus intimately, including Peter and James, the brother of Jesus. So Paul must have picked up an awful lot of truth about what Jesus did and said from these people who had known Jesus so well. What Paul picked up was inspiring enough for him to found churches all over the Mediterranean region.

So what triggered that letter of Paul's to the early Christian church in Rome? Clearly the congregation in Rome was arguing - but why?

Well, a few years before, the Roman Emperor Claudius had expelled all Jewish people from Rome, - historians think it was

because of their over-zealous mission activities and religious disputes.

So the early Christian house churches in Rome lost all their Jewish leadership and membership, and for five years they were led only by the Gentile Christians, until Emperor Claudius died.

At that point, Jewish Christians began to return, coming back to a church that had become quite Roman and non-Jewish in lifestyle and practice.

The returning **Jewish Christians** felt they should continue to keep Jewish dietary restrictions and observe Sabbath dates. It was their heritage after all. But sadly, they **judged** the Gentiles for disregarding these practices. Paul described them as **"weak" in Christian faith** because they wanted to hang on to these old laws.

On the other hand, **the Gentile Christians** understood that faith in Christ completely freed them from Jewish ritual laws, allowing them to eat anything and view every day equally. Sadly, **they** looked down on Jewish Christians for being overly restrictive. Paul described them as **"strong" in Christian faith** simply because they saw it wasn't necessary to observe the Jewish restrictions.

So Paul's letter to this squabbling young church was to try to prevent more serious division. Rather than forcing one thing or another, Paul told both factions to just get on with it and stop judging each other, because every believer ultimately answers to God alone - and nobody else.

How sensible! But how sad that Christians can still argue amongst themselves.

I'm unaware of any seriously bad feelings within our St James community, but even here, there are worship practice differences or

ideas which can leave us feeling either uplifted or dispirited as we leave church. It's very personal.

Some of us share similar thoughts and ideas about faith and worship, and some of us differ in how we think about spiritual matters and religious practice.

But despite any differences and possible disagreements, we are intimately connected.

We are literally connected to each other by the flow of God's physical Living Water through us and through all of creation since time began. The water that formed the early oceans and that has flowed through seas, rivers, clouds, plants, animals and humans continues to flow through us right now.

At the same time, perhaps we can think of our faith as the flow of God's spiritual Living Water within and between us, which connects us as a Christian Community, each of us trying to follow the way of Jesus - siblings in Christ.

We are connected, and we belong.

May we recognise these age-old spiritual and physical connections with each other, and be strengthened by them as we show God's love in this struggling world.

Amen