

SALTBUSH
UNITING THE SCATTERED COMMUNITY

Ruminations



River

Spring/Summer 2019

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Contributors:

Alison Carr is both a teacher and artist from Tamworth and is part of the Tamworth Southside Congregation. Alison's contribution, 'Given', is based on the passage from Matthew 10... "Anyone who gives a cup of cold water will be blessed".

Rev. Yvonne Ghavalas is the Community Minister of the Southern Region, within the Riverina Presbytery. The Southern Region includes the congregations of Tumbarumba, Holbrook, Walbundrie, Culcairn/Henty, The Rock, Lockhart and Pilgrim Wagga Wagga.

Rev. Dr. David Reichardt is a Uniting Church Minister at Normanhurst Uniting Church. He has a PHD in ecotheology based on the Murray-Darling Basin.

Rev. Dr. Peter Walker is the Principal of United Theological College and has studied history, philosophy and theology.

Editor's Introduction

Welcome to your spring/summer edition of Ruminations
with the theme of

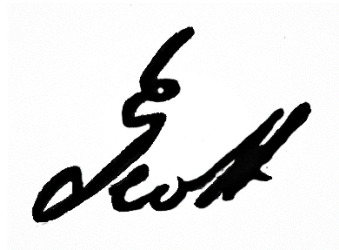
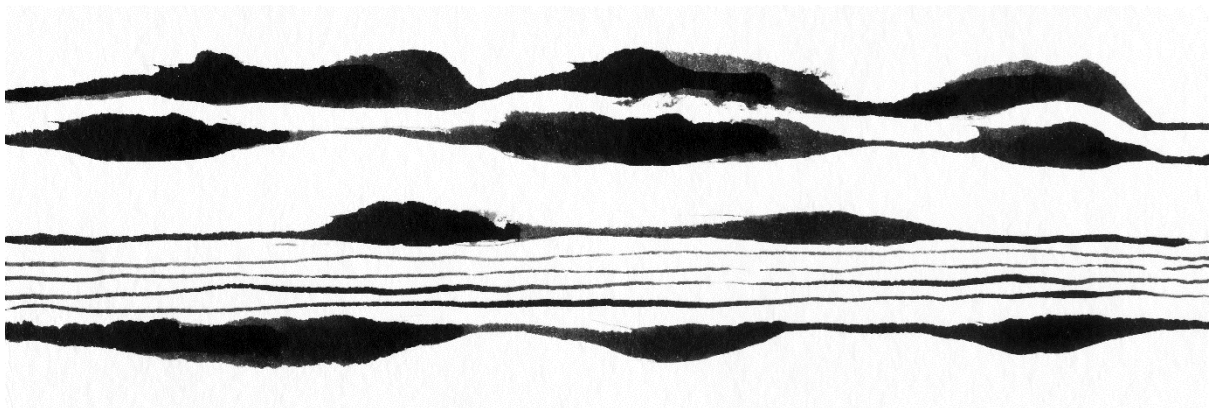
River!

As this issue of Ruminations goes to print I'm in Tamworth getting ready for the Saltbush Gathering. In the last month or so I have travelled over much of the NSW/ACT Synod from my home in Brucedale; north towards Tullibigeal and west towards Hillston, Menindee and Broken Hill before heading home via Hay and now another trip north via Orange, Narrabri, Tamworth, Inverell and back towards Sydney and Canberra. I have crossed many rivers and water courses, many of which are dry or have next to no water in them, but some like the Murrumbidgee are still running and it was good to spend a little time on the banks of the Darling where water still flows.

In this issue of Ruminations we have a number of contributors talking about their experiences of rivers and what they mean to them. Yvonne Ghavalas takes us on a journey back to her childhood and the rivers she encountered with their sights, smells and adventures. Peter Walker re-tells of his experience of the image of the river from the book of Revelation and how that profoundly changed his life. David Reichardt regales us with stories of rivers from all over the world and their life giving qualities and yet reminds us of the fragile nature of our river systems here in Australia.

One of the themes that comes through each of the articles is the sense of hope and life that rivers give to people and the creation. In this spring and summer time as the drought holds us in its grip I pray that these stories of hope, life and love encourage you to take heart in the sustaining presence of God who journeys with us like a river through the landscape.

Peace to you all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E. Scott", is centered on a light gray rectangular background.

A word from the Moderator

Rev. Simon Hansford

Moderator of the Synod of NSW & ACT.

As I write this I have had most of this week at home for the first time in a while. It's good to be home, even though the paddocks are more dust than anything else, and our garden is battling.

I have taken the opportunity to do some thinking – and writing - about our church, and our future. In the last fortnight I have visited with our school chaplains on retreat in Katoomba, and met with our Social Justice Forum in Taree. I gathered with our Synod's rambunctious young leaders at the Pulse YouLead conference in Elanora Heights and I had the pleasure of commissioning the new Principal of PLC, Dr Kate Hadwen. In the last month I have worshipped alongside the Adult Fellowship for the Sydney Central Coast Presbytery, and with Blacktown, Glenbrook and Yass.

Just over a month ago, I wandered through Canberra Region Presbytery, learning about the ministry and worship life of Bega and Tathra, Eden, Jindabyne, Cooma, Goulburn and congregations throughout Canberra.

This travelogue reminds me of the different shapes of our church's life, echoing the various shapes of community in which our congregations live and serve. Some of the folk I visited are struggling; many are wresting new ministry from the old ways of

doing things, learning from the wisdom of those who have gone before.

The shape of our ministry always needs to change as the context and community change; new people will move into our community and new challenges will emerge. Some challenges, like this extraordinary drought, seem to hinder us at every step.

The shape of our mission needs to change, but the shape of our hope does not. We are forever disciples of the crucified and risen Lord, Jesus. Our hope exists despite the circumstances and declares to us when everything else seems to say "no", that God's "yes" is stronger. It is not congregations who work harder who grow, it is congregations who trust in the hope they have in Jesus. It is communities of faith who look for the face of Jesus in each other and in the faces of those they serve.

May the risen Crucified One bless you for this season;
May the blessing of rain come to our parched paddocks and lives;
May the Spirit of hope accompany you at every step,
especially when you stumble,
and when you dance.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Simon". Below the name is a single, slightly curved horizontal line.

Ruminating on Rivers

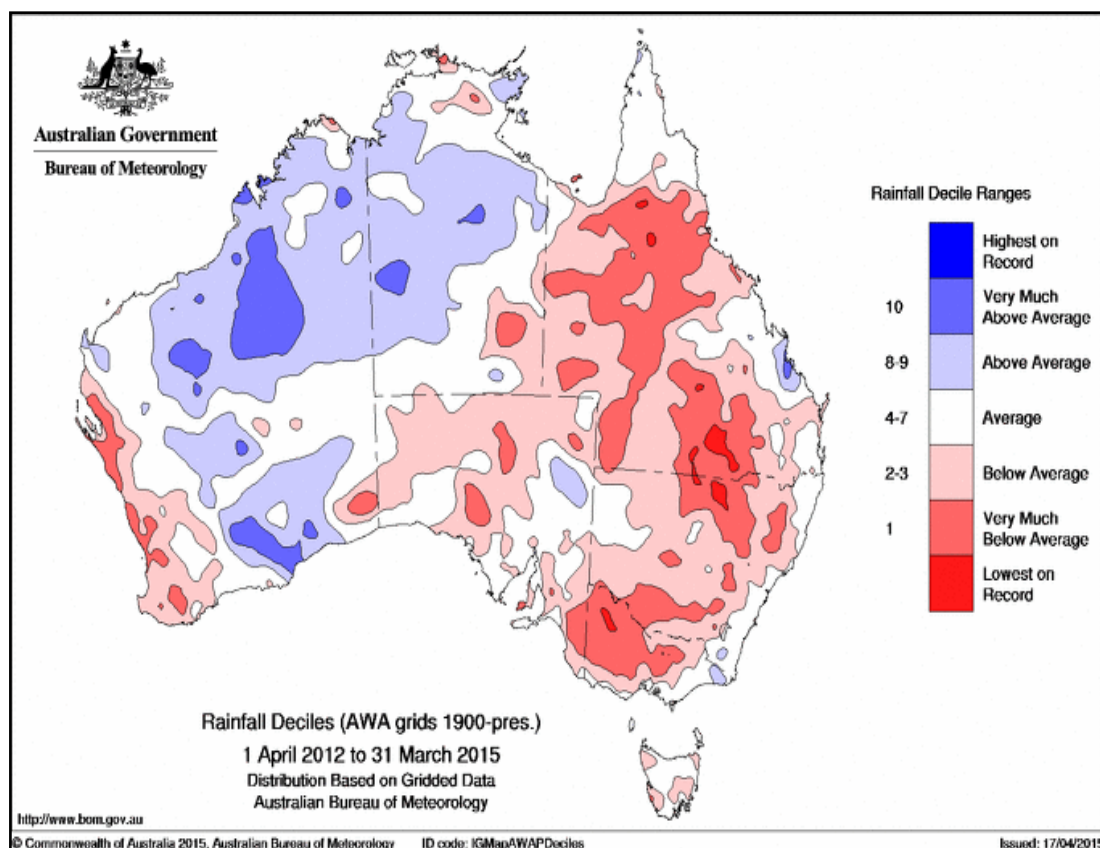
David Reichardt

Normanhurst Uniting Church.

For the wrong reasons the Murray-Darling Basin has been back in the news. So is much of Australia. We are in drought again, and that includes much of the Basin. A few months ago my wife and I joined a group of mostly Uniting Church people who, led by Dorothy and Paul Creek, bussed from Wagga Wagga to Uluru and back, learning about what it means to “Walk on Country”. In the course of our journey we met and got to know some of the people of several aboriginal communities involved in the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. That was important, but so was the chance to “check out country”. What was this drought, green in places, parched in others, really like? Generally, Australia’s droughts strike hardest west of the “sandstone curtain”. It looked to me what has since proved to be the case. The further south we ventured the wetter it seemed to be. Which is a positive way of saying that in northern New South Wales it looked dry.

“One swallow does not a summer make,” goes the saying. As I write this in Camden Theological Library, North Parramatta, adjacent to Lake Parramatta, one of Sydney’s early dams and water supplies, it’s been raining solidly all day, but meteorologists have been telling us that annual average rainfall started decreasing in Western Australia in the 1970s, and that trend has been moving slowly eastward, for example:

“National rainfall for 2018 was 11% below the 1961–1990 average, with an Australian annual total of 412.8 mm (the 1961–1990 average is 465.2 mm). Compared to rainfall since 1900 (119 years), this makes 2018 the 39th-driest year on record. Annual mean rainfall (mm) for Australia since 1900.” [Jan 10, 2019, Annual Climate Statement, 2018; bom.gov.au]



Rainfall trends in Australia over the 3 years, 1/4/2012 - 31/3/2015

As evidence for a drying trend this is still equivocal, but reports we city types are getting from west of the Divide are certainly worrying. The Bureau of Meteorology’s Annual Climate Statement, 2018, shows that the drying trend is now most pronounced in the south-eastern quarter of the continent,

precisely where the Murray-Darling Basin is located. That is important because the Basin is Australia's most significant source of food and fibre. Over a decade ago, when I was researching a PhD in ecotheology that built on studying the Basin, the figure was 40%. Last year, however, Australia imported wheat from Canada, and this year farm sector income is likely to have declined again.



Given – Alison Carr

With those reports of drying climate and green drought come tiredly familiar reports of quarrelling between the various jurisdictions (Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and the ACT) and stakeholders (dryland and irrigation farmers, miners, environmentalists and others) over water allocation, fracking, coal mining, environmental flows and the like. There were the reports of water theft, of protests at the scope, even the bare existence of environmental flows. There were threats at a state level to abandon the Basin Plan that was agreed upon during John Howard's tenure as Prime Minister. There were the inevitable environmental disasters, followed by recriminations and ministerial "doubling down" (to use one of those new Americanisms!) And there were, of course, horrible images of mass fish kills caused by too little, too hot and too de-oxygenated water in the Darling River. "Was this the face of climate change?" some wondered.

Personally, I felt depressed and disillusioned. I've taken a keen interest in ecology and ecotheology since my first placement in Northern New England, on the Basin's north eastern fringe, in the late 1980s. From that time onward I've probably encountered most of the attitudes to nature doing the rounds in Australia. "Doing the rounds" might be a good way of describing our national environmental debate, and particularly the debate over the Murray-Darling Basin. You may have encountered those white T-shirts with "SMP" emblazoned across the chest. Sex. Money. Power. The unholy trinity, at least one of which you can generally find at the cause of any societal problem. For all the good people trying and succeeding in making a positive difference (and I have met many), I was hearing the same bickering, greed and powerlust I'd heard a decade before when studying the Basin intensively and read about in histories of

European settlement of the Basin in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

"What's the point?" I wondered, dispiritedly. "I've been giving this environmental stuff my best shot for 30 years, and it doesn't seem to have done much good." But there's no use in criticising. (Though I have now done some of that!) All that does is tar everyone with the same brush. Besides, I *am* a city slicker. What would I know?

I had coffee with a colleague, who reminded me that I'm not God's employee. According to St Paul we followers of Jesus don't work *for* the Holy Spirit; we work *in* the Holy Spirit. The Murray-Darling Basin is God's Basin to restore, renew, or do whatever God wants to do with it, not mine to fix, although it is vital that we participate in God's work. And I thought, "If love is so central to our Christian faith, perhaps if I share some of the love I have for rivers in my life it will put others in touch with their stories of rivers. Because rivers are really, really important to human and nature's flourishing. So I decided to celebrate the importance of rivers to our societies and civilisations by telling some of my "riverine stories". Here goes.

The first encounter with a river I remember having was seeing the mighty Niagara Falls, created by the Niagara River that marks the border between the US and Canada. Actually, "seeing" is an incompetent choice of word to describe that visceral experience. What I remember best was riding in an open carriage, and that there was spray everywhere! I was 3 at the time, but this experience must have impressed me: it's one of the few experiences I remember from the 2 years at the beginning of my life my family spent in North America and Fiji.

My next significant encounter with a river was with the Herbert River in Far North Queensland. In 1962 my family returned to Australia and to far north Queensland, home territory for my parents, but new for me. As I said, I was a city slicker, born in Sydney. Living in the village of Macknade on the banks of the Herbert River was an adventure. I remember riding over the rickety old wooden bridge spanning the Herbert and into the regional town of Ingham during a flood. Passenger vehicles had to be carried across the bridge on the trays of trucks to avoid being submerged, and perhaps even washed into the river.

I also remember being left to myself while my parents took my younger brothers somewhere. There was only a levee bank between our house (which of course was built on concrete piles) and the mighty Herbert River. I climbed over the levee, found a dinghy, and started to play in it. When my parents found me they fairly freaked out! One day a year or so later I gained a better appreciation of the reason for their upset. The school bus I was travelling in passed the Macknade pub. There, tied to a post out the front of the pub, was a crocodile at least 3 metres long. On another occasion I was walking along the levee by the Herbert River to Sunday School in the little, wooden church that stood almost literally in the shadow of the huge Macknade sugar mill, the reason for the village's existence. A Red-Bellied Black Snake crossed the path right in front of me. I'm not sure which one of us moved faster, in opposite directions - the snake or me! My nickname during those days of the early '60s, when the Concorde had just started flying across the Atlantic, was "Supersonic". That Sunday morning I probably justified it!

After 2 years we moved back to Sydney, where I spent the rest of my childhood and adolescence. In the scouts we spent a fair bit

of time mucking about in the creeks that fed Middle Harbour. My favourite running track crossed one of these creeks via a bridge that also supported a pipeline. It felt good to be able to access the bush so close to home, but I was a little disappointed that so few people were doing that. After university I moved to inner city Glebe, where the water courses were cemented in and sometimes over. These days we can tell where they were from the lines of trees we see on google maps.

I moved to India, where I worked for several years in a Leprosy hospital in the district town of Salur, which stood on the banks of the Vegavathi River. Compared with our Australian rivers the Vegavathi was huge, yet I'd be very surprised if you have heard of it. Rev Prof Dean Drayton, a former President of the Uniting Church, tells a story that also works for my experience of India. Dean once attended a conference in the United States. When he arrived at his destination he joined a group of delegates who just happened to be discussing the question "What made America great?" Not "great again", but great in the first place. Somebody thought it was the pilgrims' Christian faith. Someone else was convinced it was the influence of the Founding Fathers. Others ascribed this greatness to good ole Yankee get up and go, still others to private enterprise, the capitalistic financial system. Dean listened for a while, then said, "I've just flown here from the world's driest continent, Australia, and across your great country. The thing that particularly struck me was how well-watered America is. My flight crossed river after great river. Your country is richly watered. I think that it is your rivers, and the abundance of your water that has enabled America to be great."

I have travelled by train from one end of India to the other, crossing in the process I don't know how many long bridges over

great rivers. I would say that Dean's opinion on the importance of water and rivers has much to recommend it. Let's check that.

If I say "Thames", what do you associate the river to? London, of course!

"Seine"?	Paris!
"Hudson"?	New York!
"The Nile"?	Cairo!
"Rome"?	Tiber!
"Rhine"?	Cologne, Bonn, Strasbourg!
"Indus"?	Most of Pakistan!
"Jamuna"?	Delhi!

By the way, there is a persistent legend that a third great river, the Sarasvathi, joined the first two at a city called Allahabad. While that takes us to palaeogeology, it also takes us to the role of rivers in religion, a theme to which I shall return. A few more riverine associations:

"What are China's two great rivers?"	Yangtze and Yellow!
"Myanmar"?	Irrawaddy!
"Southeast Asia"?	Mekong!

What about Australia? Ours is the driest continent, but each of our major cities has its water source. Melbourne has the Yarra, too thick to swim in, too thin to plough, say rude Sydneysiders. Hobart has the Derwent, Adelaide has the Torrens, Perth the Swan, Darwin has the Darwin River and Brisbane has the Brisbane River. Sydney has several rivers, including the Tank Stream, Parramatta River, the Cooks River, the George's River, the Lane Cove River (whose navigable length I have kayaked) and the

twice named Hawkesbury-Nepean (on which I've kayaked from Windsor to Ebenezer).

And my point is...?

That rivers are essential for human civilisation!

In Australia I think we get the best sense of how vital rivers are by paying attention not to the short rivers that sustain our cities, but to the great Murray-Darling Basin that has sustained 40% of our nation's agriculture. Yet it's almost as though we demand more of the Basin's waterways than they are capable of giving. Both the Murray and the Darling Rivers feature in the list of the world's longest rivers, but in terms of the volume of water that passes between their banks to the sea they are relatively insignificant. About 1 millionth of the volume of water flowing down the Amazon River, the world's largest river by volume, flows down the Murray and, apart from during times of flood the Darling has far less water even than this. Anthropologists, historians and archaeologists think that aboriginal people lived in greater concentrations along the lower Murray River than anywhere else in Australia, that they lived in at least semi-permanent structures and that they were substantially clothed against winter's chill in the south of the continent, but their lifestyle was still far less environmentally costly than ours is.

If rivers are essential for human civilisation it's no wonder that they feature in the world's religions. The Nile and several of the Indian rivers are some of the best examples of this. The primary role of the Egyptian Pharaoh was to intercede in the spiritual realm to ensure that the annual flood down the Nile happened. Compared with the Nile the Jordan River is puny yet, similarly,

one of the Bible's basic motifs is "the River of the Water of Life". Here are some of the stories caught up in this motif. Fleeing Egypt's army the Israelites were enabled to pass through the Red Sea when God by Moses' agency divided it. The Red Sea is not a river, but it is valid to include this basic story from the Exodus because it, too, points to a powerful God who provided salvation for his people. The Israelites kept forgetting this. When they complained at the lack of water in the Sinai desert Moses struck the rock at Horeb, causing water to flow out. (Exodus 17.1-7) At what were later called the Waters of Meribah, Moses again struck the rock and again water flowed out. But because Moses had not obeyed God he was not permitted to enter the Promised Land. (Numbers 20.2-13) Instead, it became Joshua's task to lead the Israelites across Jordan. On this occasion the water piled up, enabling the people to cross the riverbed, when the feet of the priests bearing the Ark of the Covenant touched the water of the Jordan.

Another two rivers, the Euphrates and Tigris, became symbols of Israel's bane and sorrow. By the way, the Tigris and Euphrates, so well-known to this day, are joined by two other rivers whose identity is a mystery, the Gihon and the Pishon, in the Bible's first mention of the theme of the rivers of the water of life, in Genesis 2. But the city of Babylon, capital of the Babylonian Empire, built between the two great rivers where they came close to each other, became a symbol of exile, captivity and death for Israel:

"By the waters, the waters of Babylon
We lay down and wept, and wept for thee Zion.
We remember thee, remember thee, remember thee Zion."

...sang Don McLean, remembering Israel's grief.

The prophet Ezekiel lived during the time of Judah's Babylonian Exile. In a vision which is recorded in Ezekiel 47.1-12 the prophet foresaw the restoration of hope: the river of the water of life flowing from the temple and out into the land, healing and restoring it. God's New Creation, and the project that will bring it about, is not simply personal restoration of a small nation's fortunes. That is simply the smaller, nearer to hand event that in Israelite prophetic tradition points to God's greater, more distant goal. But the end of the Babylonian Captivity was wonderful in itself. Let's stay with it for a while.

Psalm 126 was probably written when Judah's Babylonian captivity ended. The psalmist's joy is palpable:

*"When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then it was said among the nations,
'The Lord has done great things for them.'
The Lord has done great things for us,
and we rejoiced.
Restore our fortunes, O Lord,
like the watercourses in the Negeb.
May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.
Those who go out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
carrying their sheaves."*

The prayer that God restore Israel's fortunes like the watercourses in the Negeb, and that those who sow in tears may reap with shouts of joy, is fitting for those caught up in Australia's current drought.

Ezekiel's dearly held desire was improved upon in the Bible's last chapter. In fact, Ezekiel 47.1-12 functions as a kind of model for Revelation 22.1-5. The latter depicts the River of the Water of Life flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb out into the city, the new Jerusalem, down the main street, flanked by the trees whose leaves were for the healing not just of Israel, but of the nations, and which fruited monthly. This theme, the river of the water of life, stands for and points to God's new Creation.

In John chapter 7 we reach the climax of this great theme. On the final day of the nine day long festival of Sukkoth, which commemorated God's provision of water by Moses striking the rock at Horeb, Jesus interrupted the great ceremony by saying:

"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."

The evangelist explained that:

"By this He meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified."

That is Jesus' promise to you. To us who have been "later to receive". The River of the Water of Life is the Holy Spirit who indwells Jesus' followers, His friends. God is about Restoration

and New Creation. God the Spirit will achieve and is achieving this in and through us, flowing out from us, into the world, to heal the world.

I'll finish by telling you a little about my two other favourite rivers. I lived beside the Beas for two years in its guise as a swift, turbulent young Himalayan stream. Once, however, while circumventing a Punjabi roadblock, we discovered it in its guise as a plains river - enormously broad and much slower flowing. It crosses India's geologically irrelevant border with Pakistan and becomes a tributary to the Indus. Just as the Murrumbidgee, by whose levee at Wagga Wagga, I lived for several months after leaving the Beas, becomes a tributary to the Murray.

Tributary. A tributary brings what it has to the greater. Even the Amazon, which brings 809,000 cubic meters of water each second, is tributary to the Atlantic Ocean. There is much that ruminating on rivers can teach us.

Our stories...

To the Deep!

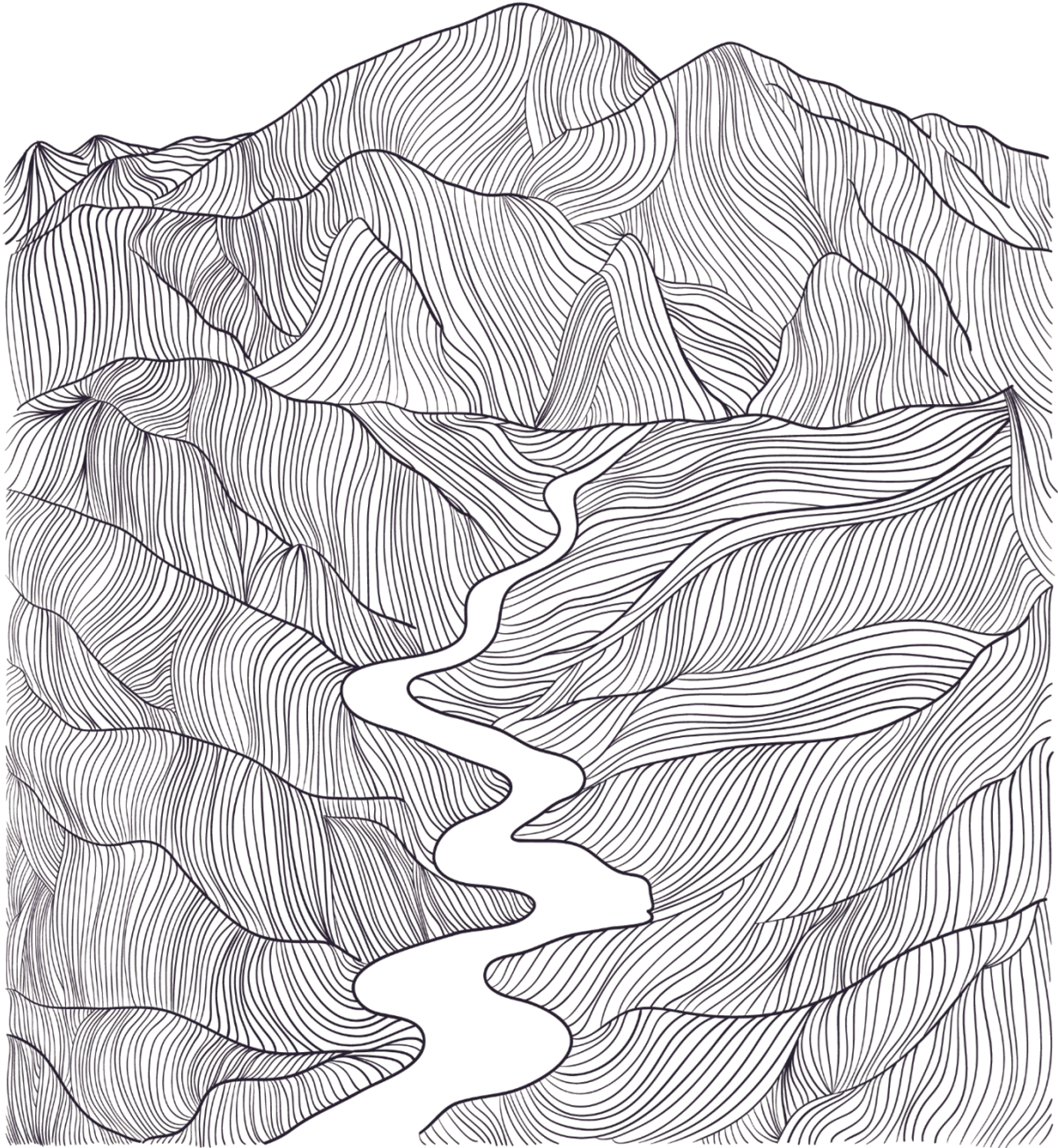
Yvonne Ghavalas

Community Minister of the Southern Region, Riverina.

I'm a city girl from South Africa.

What do I know about rivers, I wondered, other than the fact that tons of waste - human, plastic, metal and rubber – flow with the Jukskei through the heart of Alexandra Township where children play and women rub their hands raw cleaning clothes and the really poor draw, with their drinking water, cholera and other contaminants; and foreigners and newcomers are accidentally baptised along with all their meagre belongings when the bank caves in or the river floods I wonder, and slowly memories float to the surface... of riding horses on a family holiday beneath the festive canopy of flaming poplar leaves - the Caledon River a wide and muddy divider between us and the children on the other side who stop skipping stones to wave and shout and run beside us until they're out of breath and disappear against the brown hills where thin donkeys bray...

...of running barefoot with my brothers on freshly cut grass to join the black blurs of our dogs in the shallow stream where we spent lazy Sunday afternoons vying to catch cranky crabs with bits of bacon tied to a string and tadpoles with my mum's flour sieve (which one of us had carefully smuggled out - though, in hindsight, I'm sure she knew) ...



... of careening round narrow UK roads between Hadrian's Wall and Gretna Green in a tiny car with the windows rolled down to accommodate my heavily pregnant friend while I slowly turned purple from cold in the back seat; our raucous laughter silenced by a silver cascade splitting open the grey canopy of cloud and glistening and gleaming down the green, green, green

of a hill that disappeared too rapidly from view ... of hiking through the empty expanse of the Kruger National Park to gaze over the Luvuvhu River Valley and the eerie, enormous, evergreen Nyala trees which send their roots down deep into the soil where there is water even when the river runs low, and the baboons seek shelter, and the antelope graze, and the leopards hunt in the undergrowth, while the crocodiles control the balance of fish in the water - all animal and plant life working together for good ...

... of taking my children by the hand to gaze up at rainbows strewn in the sky by waterfalls -framed by the verdant greens of things growing in the unlikelyst of places; or down at giant potholes that swirling eddies of water have shaped in the sandstone through the ages -unperturbed, unprepared to alter their course, no matter the obstacle...

... of leaving my Anglo-African roots - long nourished by the living waters of heart-family and Christian community - to be planted, by faith, by the big waters of the Murrumbidgee in a time of drought when the language of scarcity and decline makes it hard to remember where we've come from or perceive the signs of life all around us or trust God for what lies around the unseen bend or hold community together with our own shallow strength.

Let's listen again to the shh-shh-shh of the Spirit murmuring over the hard, hurt places: "to the deep, to the deep"... to the deep, beloved, where we'll one day walk again in the garden with God, and the tears that we cried by the rivers of Babylon will be wiped away by God's own hand, and the crystal

clear waters of Life will flow from the throne down the middle of our streets, and night will be no more.

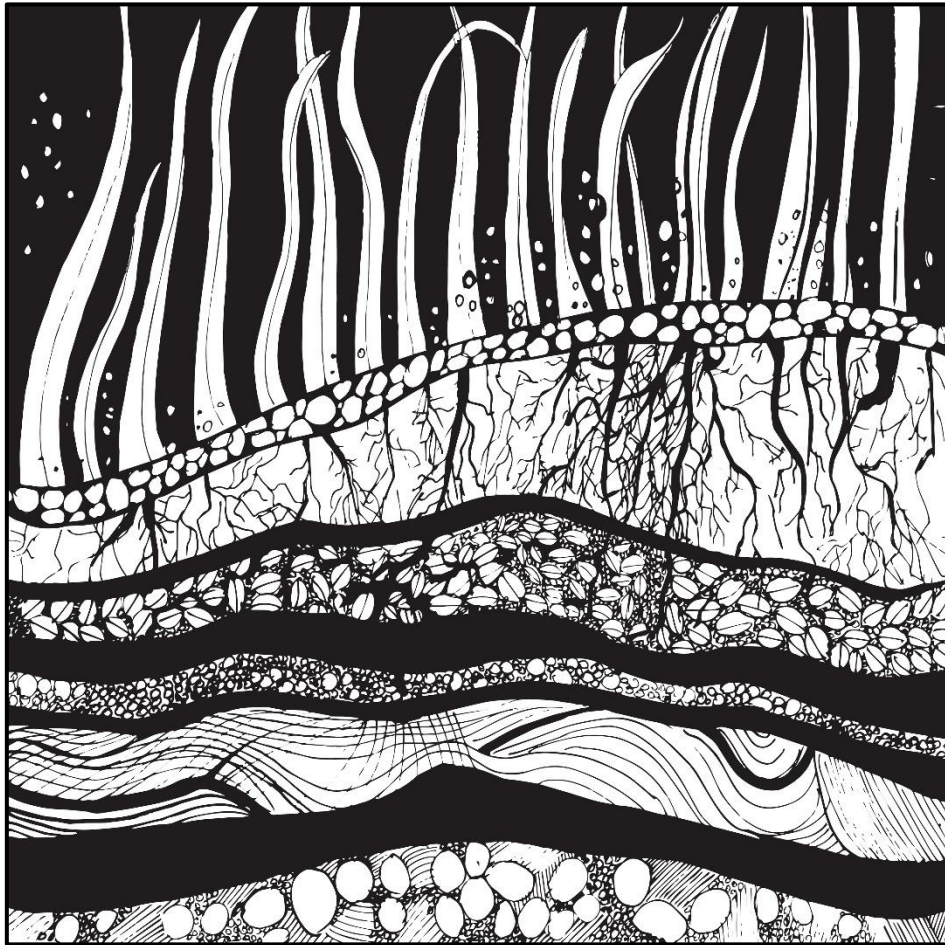


Yvonne Ghavalas

The Diviner's Call

Geoff Wellington

Brucedale, NSW.



Down deep, deep beyond the light
In the dreaming time as the land was formed
and shaped lies streams and rivers and lakes.
Fed from the ranges and hills to beyond our shores,
slowly bit by bit it seeps to the depths below.

Lying silently in the dark the elements call to elements.
Forked stick and copper wire bend and dance as they call to
each other.

Down deep, deep beyond the light lies water waiting for the
Diviner's energy.

The stick and wire pull and bounce in the Diviner's hand,
Element calls to element and the secret water,
down deep beyond the light responds.

At the borers hand the water is released from its depth
to gush to the surface to bring forth life and growth.
What joy it brings to the parched land, thirsty animal and
human kind.

But wait;
In this ancient land such water so long in being gathered
down deep, beyond the light is finite.
This sacred water from the deep brings life and growth
and in exchange treasure its healing power.

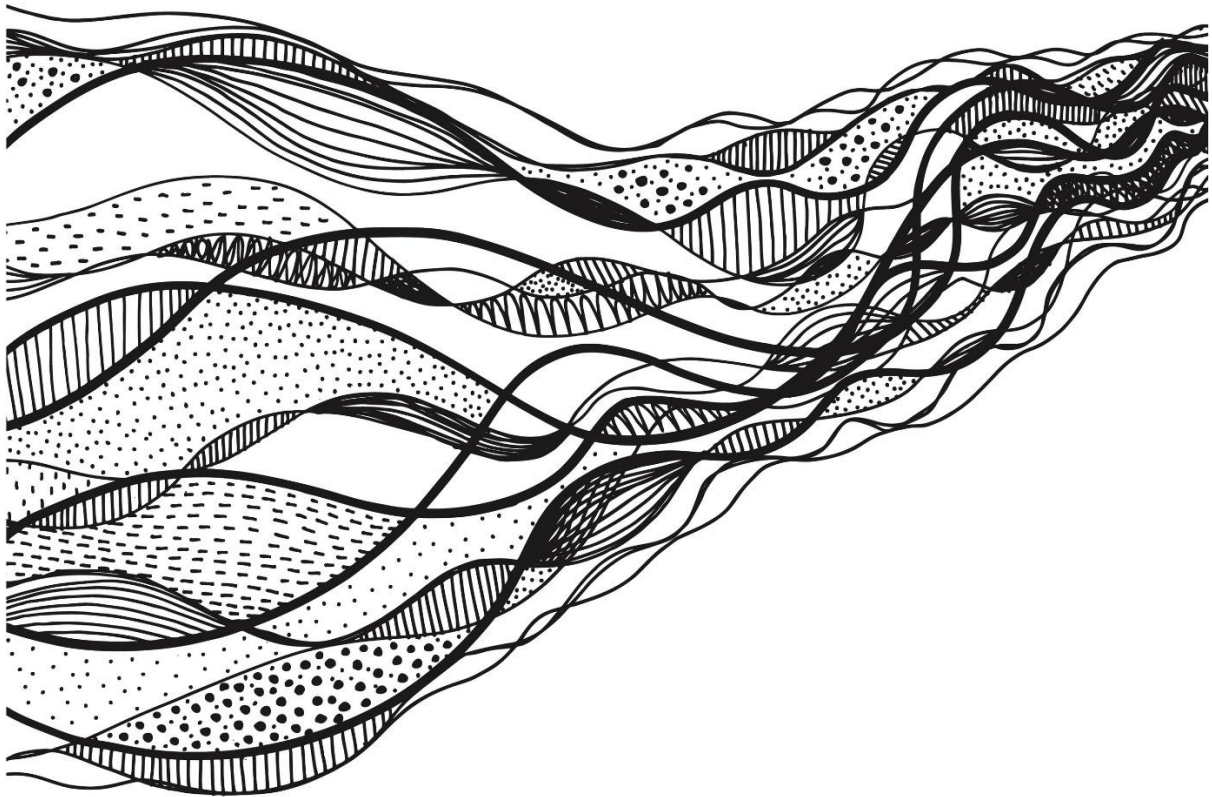
And now give thanks for the water down deep,
beyond the light that adds to the bounty of the sacred earth.
That we might treasure everyday life to come,
from water down deep beyond the light.

Experiencing the Word...

Revelation and its River

Rev. Dr. Peter Walker

Principal – United Theological College



When I was 20 years of age, I heard Nelson Mandela speak at a prayer service for the people of South Africa. It was one of the most moving occasions that I can recall because it was the first time I realized how truly inspiring it is to meet someone who is sustained by hope. Sustained by a vision of what might be.

It was also the first time that the book of Revelation meant anything to me at all.

As a university student, I sat up all night, just months beforehand, to watch Nelson Mandela's release from prison. I have always been drawn to people with the courage of their convictions, especially when it leads to personal sacrifice. As we all know, Mandela spent 27 years in prison for his convictions.

The service of prayer was in Sydney's St Mary's Cathedral. I am still surprised that I was there at all. I was a decidedly un-prayerful person then. Yet I am very glad something drew me in.

The book of Revelation became special for me from that day forward because the reading offered during the service contained the following verses from Revelation 21:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away... And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God... And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of the Lord is its' light ... Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, flowing from the throne of God ... On either side ... was the tree of life... and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

The service was deeply moving. Beautiful hymns were raised. An African choir sang with an emotion that took people's breath away. Magnificent prayers were offered.

Yet I had been given ears to hear only the words of Nelson Mandela and the writer we know as John, a prisoner on the Island of Patmos, who was not far from death at the time he wrote.

John had a great vision of what God's new creation might come to be, in God's own good time. And he knew, as did Mandela, that holding fast to your dreams is the way to endure all hardship.

I sat below the grand windows and arches of St Mary's. I looked up at Mandela. I listened to his courage and his hope. I heard his words of faith. Then I heard John's vision of a world made new. I heard all these words not only with my ears. I truly heard them somewhere deeper than that.

A holy city with a life-giving river, which brings healing for us, and healing for the nations.

For the first time, I knew that I was a Christian – and not for any of the reasons that I expected. I was overwhelmed by the realisation that it is through the power of hope that God draws and saves. And does so now. God's transforming power is the river of life and it is a river of hope, flowing into our lives from the throne of God. Healing for us. Healing for the nations. God is the hope and salvation of the nations.

John, the author of Revelation, knows that human language is incapable of expressing the reality of eternal things. Yet, rather than be paralysed by the finitude of human existence, he is set free by his inspired imagination to portray the wonder of the

Gospel in a masterpiece of hope. In the end, we will meet the beginning.

The idea of a heavenly Jerusalem that would become the ultimate home of the people of God is not an original one. John is not just a visionary. He has, in fact, gathered the wisdom of many others. Like a number of Christian authors before him and beside him, such as the writers of Galatians, Philippians and Hebrews, this idea of a heavenly city was already present to John in the apocalyptic tradition of Jewish thought. 'Apocalyptic' being a form of writing that sought to paint word-pictures of what hope looks like.

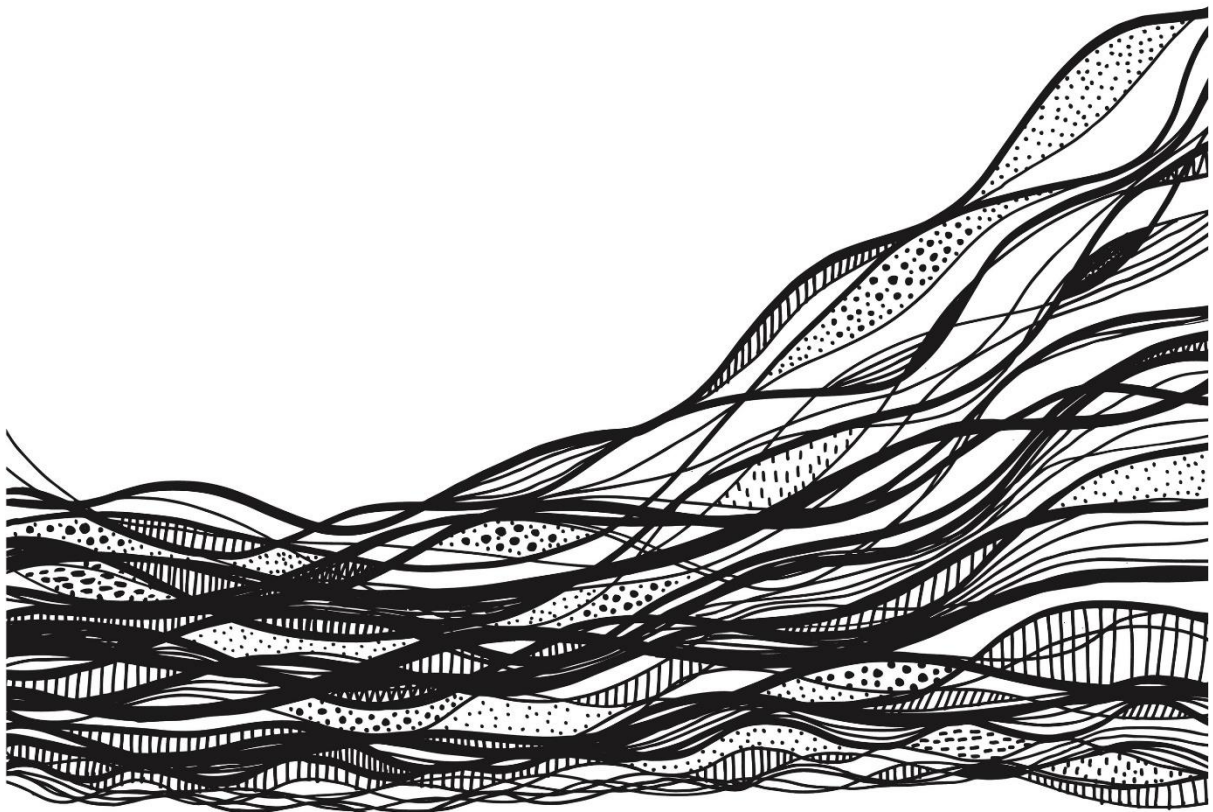
And this is where the real inspiration lies.

In John's vision God says, 'See, I am making all things new' (21: 5) and so we note that God does not say, I am making 'all new things'. God cares for *this world* and seeks to transform and renew it. It will not be replaced by a 'new' world. At the end of our hoping, we find the renewal of all that is here and now. This world is not dispensable.

And John gives very moving expression to the Christian conviction that in the end we meet, not an event, but God. In the end, there is no temple, because there is no longer need for a special place or special time to encounter transcendence. In the end, there is God. God will be all in all.

I once thought of these visions as day-dreaming and Christianity as a puff of smoke. Now I think these visions, and the hope they inspire, are more important than anything else in all the Scriptures.

Revelation and its River brought an end to my adjustment to what is, and were the genesis of my decision to live for what might be. Hope is the way God stirs hearts. As we ruminate upon rivers, we recall God's river of hope, which brings healing for us, and healing for the nations.



News from Saltbush...

Rev. Mark Faulkner

Director of Rural and Remote Ministry Initiatives

The Saltbush team have recently held two Scattered Community Gatherings; one in Brucedale near Wagga Wagga and the other in Tamworth. We were thankful and encouraged by the groups who gathered together and especially for those who came from both distant places and smaller congregations.

The most significant part of our gatherings has been the slow building of relationships both with individuals and congregations and from those the opportunities to talk about the way we gather for worship as congregations and the way we live out our faith within the wider community.

It is a fundamental part of the Saltbush ethos that the only genuine life for church and the only gospel for community will be lived out through relationship. This is part of our theology and our Christology; as an expression of God's relationship with humanity.

At the gathering at Brucedale we also celebrated the commissioning of Geoff Wellington into the role of Scattered Community Minister as part of the Saltbush team! We can be thankful for Geoff and for the slow building of the Saltbush team over time.



Saltbush has also launched our website which is intended to go hand in hand with our relationship with you.

<https://saltbushcommunity.uca.org.au/>

While the site is still taking shape it will be a place where individuals, groups or congregations can download and watch the Saltbush weekly message, download the latest Saltbush liturgy, get information and register for our up and coming events, read the latest publication of Ruminations, get our latest news, get in touch with us as and donate specifically to Saltbush.

As part of the genuine nature of Saltbush we are working towards every image on our web site, every message, every liturgy, every gathering and every event being our own and reflecting the people who make up the Saltbush community.

In 2020 we are planning four Scattered Community Gatherings over the course of the year; one north, one south, one westerly and one easterly! Again these will be opportunities for anyone in our congregations who are wanting the encouragement to ponder the challenge both of the present and the future. At all our Scattered Community Gatherings we seek to provide grounded support and encouragement, both for the gathering (worship) and for the going (mission).

In 2020 we also hope to launch our Saltbush Café, where a number of times a week on different days/nights, people from across the land can join in a discussion group. Virtual coffee will be roasted and poured for free courtesy of the Saltbush team! The Saltbush Café will seek to provide an opportunity for people to discuss faith, life and mission within the circle of Biblical reflection.

Early in 2020 we also hope to welcome our third Scattered Community Minister with an emphasis towards our online work. Just like planting a saltbush, olive tree or vineyard it takes time to grow and shape something worthwhile, which is how we are trying to shape both the Saltbush team and Saltbush as a movement to which you are invited to belong.

Remember, the Saltbush ministers are part of your ministry support and the work of the wider church and you are always welcome to get in touch.

Peace to you all.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark" followed by a long, sweeping horizontal stroke and a small dot.



Please consider financially supporting Saltbush; either as individuals or as a congregation.

Your donation will be directly used for the work of supporting Saltbush and the ways we are working to encourage smaller, rural congregations.

You can donate generally towards Saltbush and this will include the cost of enabling the printing of Ruminations.

To donate please make a direct transfer:

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Account Number: 100035066

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