

Like a River
Sept. 24, 2008
NBC Chapel

When Chaplain Lyke contacted me and invited me to share with you this evening, my immediate inclination was to decline – this isn't something I normally do. As a retired math teacher, I would much prefer to give you a wonderful lesson on the derivation of the quadratic formula, or something equally exciting. However, God reminded me that I do have something to share, and that I have an obligation to share my life experiences with the thought that they may be helpful to others who may be in similar circumstances.

A number of years ago, we learned from Forrest Gump that "Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you are going to get." This evening, I would like to share with you some ways in which I feel life is like a river.

Let's begin with "Peace like a river" – we talk about it, we sing about it, we believe it, but what does it really mean? Shortly after my husband Ralph passed away in October 2006, I purchased a Bible study workbook by Beth Moore. She has an interesting, insightful view of scripture and its application to life. One of the lessons was entitled "To Experience God's Peace", which sounded very worthwhile to me, especially at that time!

Here's some of what she said, "A river is a moving stream of water. God's Word does not say we will have peace like a pond... When God used the analogy of a river, He described a peace that can be retained while life twists and turns and rolls over boulders."

Of course, every river has a source, and an ultimate destination. Beth Moore goes on to say: "Peace like a river flows from a continuous connection with the upland Source, Jesus Christ... We who know Christ are continually moving over rocks and sometimes cliffs, through narrow places and wide valleys to a heavenly destination."

I want you to think about a river you have seen that is like that – "moving over rocks and sometimes cliffs, through narrow places and wide valleys." I wish we had time to describe these rivers to one another. But, I would like to tell you about the river that immediately came to my mind – it is the Zambezi River in Africa, and the particular spot I am thinking of is Victoria Falls. This is unlike any falls I have seen elsewhere, because the river is very, very wide – a mile wide - meandering across the plains. Suddenly, it cascades over a cliff, hitting rocks and boulders and falling into a chasm. And the river immediately is forced into a narrow gorge only 360 feet wide, and on into a series of 6 gorges, twisting and turning. In fact, this river continues through these gorges for many, many miles! This once-wide river is now confined; it becomes much more turbulent, and much, much deeper. (Google Victoria Falls, then click on Wikipedia link, and choose #3 (Victoria Falls Gorges) and you will see an amazing satellite picture of all of the gorges. Such a wide river, forced into such narrow gorges for a long way!)

So it is with my life, and yours. There are dramatic events in our lives that feel like we have fallen over a cliff. We find ourselves in a gorge, which goes on into another gorge, and on and on. Our first response is to cry out to God to rescue us. However, most of the time, that does not happen. Instead, He uses these days – weeks – months – years – to teach us, mold us, and change us. I would like to share one such sequence of events from my life with you. In December of 2004, Ralph and I were on an airplane, flying from Los Angeles to Hawaii to spend about ten days in the islands with my sister. About 2 hours before we landed in Honolulu, Ralph told me he would like to use the restroom. Because of his lack of balance

with Parkinson's Disease, I was walked behind him to steady him. As we got to the door of the restroom, he said, "I think I'm going to faint." I assured him that he was not, thinking that he was a little light-headed from changing from a sitting to a standing position. He didn't answer me, so I spoke his name and patted him on the face. He slumped to the floor. Of course, we had the immediate attention of the flight attendant, who promptly called for any medical personnel on board. Two MDs and two RNs responded. Ralph remained out cold for the remaining two hours of the flight, stretched out (all 6'5") in the galley of the aircraft, just behind the door into the cockpit. I cannot begin to describe to you what it feels like to see paramedics waiting in the jet way. They picked him up, still unconscious, and placed him on the gurney. As soon as they got through the jet way into the waiting area, they popped the gurney up into position. With that, Ralph went into a full-body seizure. Believe me, those paramedics were rapidly questioning me about his medical history, which included no such episodes. As they rushed through the airport to the ambulance, I ran to keep up with them. He regained consciousness several hours later. As I was waiting, I became aware of a song playing in my mind. It was one of the hymns, with words of assurance. During the next six days that we spent in Queens Hospital in Honolulu, God's presence was very near and very real. All kinds of tests were run, and nothing was ever determined as the cause. I will not take the time to share with you all of the amazing ways God let me know that He was with me, but I will tell you about getting home. Our tickets were on Aloha Airlines, but we had used United Airlines frequent flyer miles to get them. As I endeavored day after day to get our return tickets changed to an earlier date, I was getting nowhere. I was discussing the options (meaning purchasing tickets at a high price) with my sister in Ralph's hospital room. A nurse came in, and was attending to him. She overheard our conversation, and asked me what airline we were on. When I told her "Aloha", she replied "My mother is like the chief ticket agent for Aloha. I'll see if she can help you." And help she did – two first-class tickets! As you can imagine, I was rather apprehensive about putting him back on an airplane, but there really were no other options. The day arrived, and we were waiting at the airport to board the flight. Ralph was in a wheelchair with an attendant to put him on board first. As I stood there quite apprehensive about putting him on a plane again, from my right side, a man approached – it was one of the doctors who had been on our previous flight. Then, amazingly, from my left side came the other. They both were on the same flight with us! Can you imagine! I felt like I had been lifted on angels' wings.

As I look back over the last few years, I am aware that God has used these experiences, and so many others, to change me. I'm sure you know what river rocks look like, all rounded and smooth – no sharp edges. They don't get that way by sitting on the bank, do they. Neither do we become what God intends for us to be without being subjected to the forces of the water and the other rocks! In James 1:2-4, we read "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." In my Bible, I have written "river rocks" by this scripture

Isaiah 48:17, 18 reads, "This is what the Lord says – your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: 'I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea.'"

Let me restate that last part for us: If we pay attention to His commands, our peace will be like a river, our righteousness like the waves of the sea.

May His PEACE LIKE A RIVER flow through our lives this day!