# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“No Other Stream”**

**1 Timothy 1:15-17**

 **February 27, 2022**

Today we turn to Paul’s first letter to Timothy, a young colleague of Paul who has been asked by him to minister to the believers in the town of Ephesus. Here in the first chapter of the letter, Paul speaks of his conversion to Christianity. I invite you to turn with me to First Timothy 1:15-17

This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”—and I am the worst of them all. But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life. All honor and glory to God forever and ever! He is the eternal King, the unseen one who never dies; he alone is God. Amen.

The musical comedy, *Annie Get Your Gun*, was based on the life of sharpshooter Annie Oakley. In the film she meets the future love of her life, Frank Butler, at a shooting match, and it is not love at first sight. Frank, himself an excellent marksman, belittles Annie’s abilities, leading to the well-known song sung by Annie: “Anything you can do I can do better. I can do anything better than you.” And, of course, she goes on to prove it.

As Paul looks back at his life before he became a Christian, he sees the sin in his life and, if you will, says, “Anything you’ve done I have done worse. I have done worse than anything you’ve done.” “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – and I am the worst of them all.” Paul is amazed that God would have mercy on someone as proud and self-righteous as himself. He is astounded by the great patience that Jesus Christ had when he was persecuting the followers of Christ. If this God had mercy and patience enough for him so that he could be saved from his sinful past, he has mercy and patience enough for anyone to receive eternal life. How patient God is with us as he waits for us to come back to him when we have wandered away in our prideful independence. How merciful God is toward us, forgiving us over and over again when we sin in our arrogant belief that we can live our lives without paying attention to God.

C.S. Lewis was a proud man. A man of great intellect, a scholar at the prestigious Oxbridge University in England, and an acclaimed academic author, he had great confidence in himself and in his abilities – and he had little use for God. Using what he believed to be his superior mental faculties, he reasoned that God did not exist. Yet, he sensed that there was something missing from his life. As he spent time with his fellow academics, some of whom were Christians who openly lived and shared their faith, he saw in them something that he wanted in himself. Slowly and hesitantly he was drawn to Christ, to the patient Christ who was willing to wait for him to trust in God’s mercy.

After he became a Christian, C.S. Lewis wrote the Narnia Chronicles, a children’s fantasy story told in seven books. I’d like to read for you an excerpt from Book Four: *The Silver Chair.*  The young girl, Jill, together with her friend Scrubb, has been called into Narnia. Hearing the sound of running water, she realizes that she is terribly thirsty.

The wood was so still that it was not difficult to decide where the sound was coming from. It grew clearer every moment and, sooner than she expected, she came to an open glade and saw the stream, bright as glass, running across the turf a stone’s throw away from her. But although the sight of the water made her feel ten times thirstier than before, she didn’t rush forward and drink. She stood as still as if she had been turned into stone, with her mouth wide open. And she had a very good reason; just on this side of the stream lay the Lion.

It lay with its head raised and its two fore-paws out in front of it, like the lions in Trafalgar Square. She knew at once that it had seen her, for its eyes looked straight into hers for a moment and then turned away – as if it knew her quite well and didn’t think much of her.

“If I run away, it’ll be after me in a moment,” thought Jill. “And if I go on, I shall run straight into its mouth.” Anyway, she couldn’t have moved if she had tried, and she couldn’t take her eyes off it. How long this lasted, she could not be sure; it seemed like hours. And the thirst became so bad that she almost felt she would not mind being eaten by the Lion if only she could be sure of getting a mouthful of water first.

“If you’re thirsty, you may drink.”

They were the first words she had heard since Scrubb had spoken to her on the edge of the cliff. For a second she stared here and there, wondering who had spoken. Then the voice said again, “If you are thirsty, come and drink,” and of course she remembered what Scrubb had said about animals talking in that other world, and realized that it was the Lion speaking. Anyway, she had seen its lips move this time, and the voice was not like a man’s. It was deeper, wilder, and stronger; a sort of heavy, golden voice. It did not make her any less frightened than she had been before, but it made her frightened in rather a different way.

“Are you not thirsty?” said the Lion.

“I’m *dying* of thirst,” said Jill.

“Then drink,” said the Lion.

“May I – could I – would you mind going away while I do?” said Jill.

The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. And as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience.

The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic.

“Will you promise not to – do anything to me, if I do come?” said Jill.

“I make no promise,” said the Lion.

Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer.

“*Do* you eat girls?” she said.

“I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms,” said the Lion. It didn’t say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

“I daren’t come and drink,” said Jill.

“Then you will die of thirst,” said the Lion.

“Oh dear!” said Jill, coming another step nearer. “I suppose I must go and look for another stream then.”

“There is no other stream,” said the Lion.

It never occurred to Jill to disbelieve the Lion – no one who had seen his stern face could do that – and her mind suddenly made itself up. It was the worst thing she had ever had to do, but she went forward to the stream, knelt down, and began scooping up water in her hand. It was the coldest, most refreshing water she had ever tasted. You didn’t need to drink much of it, for it quenched your thirst at once. Before she tasted it she had been intending to make a dash away from the Lion the moment she had finished. Now, she realized that this could be on the whole the most dangerous thing of all. She got up and stood there with her lips still wet from drinking.

“Come here,” said the Lion. And she had to. She was almost between its front paws now, looking straight into its face. But she couldn’t stand that for long; she dropped her eyes.

The waters of the stream of God’s grace are available to all who thirst, but we must deal with the Christ who offers it to us. Jill fears that the lion will devour her – and that it does. Not in the physical way of killing that lions in our world practice, but in the metaphorical way of demanding that we stop living our lives on our terms so that we can live life on God’s terms. This is where so many of us stumble. We want the waters of eternal life - we want to go to heaven when we die - but we want to have them our way. Pridefully we reject the stream that Christ offers. Appealing to what we believe is our superior intellect and understanding of the world, we decide that there must be other streams, streams without a terrible Lion who demands our surrender to his purposes. But, there is no other stream. There is no other way to receive the mercy of God. He waits patiently, but if we refuse to come to Christ and drink, we will remain thirsty forever.

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.” The Apostle Peter said, “There is no other name by which we may be saved.” And Paul, in his letter to the Romans, stated: “All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Jesus – Peter – Paul – indeed, all of the Bible proclaims the same truth: there is no other stream than the one that Christ offers.

What is your story? Have you drunk at the stream or are you looking for an alternative, having bought into the lie that there are many streams, many ways to God, all of which lead to heaven? If so, know that God in his mercy waits patiently for you to come to the only stream that is able to bring forgiveness for sin and everlasting relationship with God.

Paul’s heart was moved when he remembered how gracious God had been to him, how many times God had forgiven and restored him, how God had patiently brought him along from a proud young Pharisee to a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. His response was to worship God: “All honor and glory to God forever and ever! He is the eternal King, the unseen one who never dies; he alone is God.” He alone is God – there is no other stream.