

*Some say love, it is a river, that drowns the tender reed . . .*

Rivers seem not to be appreciated in our Hebrew and New Testaments, so much of the drama being played out along a coastal stretch of rough hill country – namely Israel and Jordan. Of course there is the Jordan River but, when I visited it years ago, it wasn't much to look at – about as wide as Sonoma Creek – and runs only about 150 miles south from an elevation of 1,800 feet above sea level to the Dead Sea at a surface of 1,410 feet *below* sea level. You might say rivers bring back bad memories for ancient Israel – like the Nile, the Tigris, the Euphrates that lubricated the great empires that oppressed Israel and its neighbors so often.

Elsewhere, as on our grand continent, rivers of great power and even majesty (I think of the Hudson where I spent five years of my life) become metaphors of life itself – as has the Mississippi by the pen of Mark Twain. His story of Huckleberry Finn's drifting down that stream amounts to an education of Huckleberry about the passage of time.

Remember how Huckleberry, to escape his violent father, shared a raft with a runaway slave named Jim, who was headed for what he called the “free” states. Among the episodes encountered was the day Jim was caught by bounty hunters. When Huck found out he concluded: it doesn't pay to break the law; Jim belonged to Miss Watson as a property and so trying to escape amounted to stealing – so you get what's coming to you. Huck actually feels guilty about helping Jim in the first place.

But then he thinks about Jim, their enjoyable conversations, their singing and laughing; how Jim would stand Huck's watch so he could go on sleeping; how good he always was. And then Huck decided if caring about Jim's freedom was wicked by Missouri standards, *then I would take up wickedness again . . . and steal Jim out of slavery again, and if I could think of anything worse, I would do that, too; because as long as I was into wickedness, and in for good, I might as well go the whole hog.* Twain illustrates throughout their journey down the Mississippi how Huck grows from a mindless ragamuffin into a model of concern, a wonderfully admirable human being – which can happen to us out of our experiences down the river of life.

Mark Twain's story is only one of many stories and songs that immerse us in thoughts of rivers that say so much about the passage of time – for good or bad – like Paul Robeson's rendition of *Ol' Man River*. And there is another such lyric written by Johnny Mercer who back in the 1950's along with people like Hoagy Carmichael wrote stuff you could *think* as well as *sing* – before the noise of subsequent decades kicked in (Elvis, Buddy Holly and the Beatles excepted). My favorite by Mercer (drawn from his boyhood memories of the waters around Savannah, Georgia) is:

*Moon river, wider than a mile / I'm crossing you in style someday / Oh, dream maker /  
You heartbreaker / Where ever you're going I'm going your way / Two drifters off to see  
the world / There's such a lot of world to see / We're after the same rainbow's end /  
Waiting round the bend / My huckleberry friend / Moon river and me.*

