

THOUGHTS FOR WATER COMMUNION and IN-GATHERING

I have lived with rituals of one kind or another all my life, though at times I have not appreciated some of those rituals. Rituals of course are not just religious or spiritual, but they are repeated actions that give order to our lives. My favorite of Robert Fulghum's books is one about the Rituals of our lives. Rituals give us a framework for appreciating our lives, helping us understand the meaning of our lives, helping us cope with the transitions we face as we go through our lives.

By the time I came to Unitarian Universalism, I was tired of many of the Christian rituals, the baptisms for children whose relatives were worried about their eternal souls, the perfunctory communion rituals, the repetition of ancient statements of faith in archaic language holding little relevance for most church members.

Initially, I thought Water Communion was kind of silly, a ritual that too often differs little from show and tell after summer vacation, an activity better suited to an adolescent group than to a church. It can easily be just show and tell, but as I have aged I began to hear another level of meaning in the stories shared in the Water Communion. In part it was my recognition that we are the ones who imbue rituals with meaning. In part it was hearing the reasons for traveling where we travel. In part it was realizing that the stories of our physical journeys reflect the deeper realities of our spiritual, psychological, and philosophical journeys. Probably it had something to do also with the miles I have traveled myself, and the people I have met or journeyed with, the memories I carry from my travels.

In any case, I have come to appreciate Water Communion as deeply important over the years, not because of the ways we can trump each other with our stories and our journeys, but because we can tell the stories at all. There is no right story, there is no wrong story, each journey and each time we stay at home gives us something to reflect upon, something to ponder, something to help us go deeper in exploring our own beliefs and realities, something to

discover about ourselves and others. Each day when I sit outside with Dizzi and Molly Brown looking at my recently acquired redwood companion, I find reasons to be grateful for my life, my journey, and the people and critters with whom I have shared and will share my journey.

I am very visual as a learner and as a perceiver of reality. I like pictures, and I like looking out to see clouds and flowers and trees and oceans and rivers and people and critters and things I can look at while I am doing one thing or another. For several years, I have included pictures in the Water Communion service, and I have often been the main contributor of images. If others don't send in enough pictures, you get to see my travels, my slide show of reality! There are still a few physical places I want to go that will also feed my soul! I have yet to journey to Alaska other than in books and movies, and I really want to see Ireland, Germany, France, Switzerland, Australia and New Zealand. I decided not to apply for the Mars trip, though I could easily be tempted to visit the moon! I would like to travel the universe, but Mars just doesn't appeal as the place to end this life!

Without my journey, I wouldn't be who I am. We each are changed by the way that we move through life, the places we choose to go, the people and other animals with whom we spend our time, the things we experience, the path we choose. I have not chosen to worry about heaven or hell, but rather to enjoy this life and find as much meaning here as I can. When I pass from this life I would like to be surprised to find myself somewhere else, but why speculate on that unknown when there are so many interesting mysteries here?

Anyway, the Water Communion is an opportunity to share and reflect upon our journeys, our stories, our lives. It has what meaning we impart, it is not magical though it could be a bit mystical to mingle our waters, our stories, our lives! It means as much or as little as we choose it to mean, it offers an opportunity to ponder the flow of our lives and the ways that they parallel or intersect the lives of our companions. It is not an ancient ritual, though it involves drops of water that have flowed through all civilizations in every time and may have come to earth from another planet or from an exploding star.

Today we offer our appreciation, our praise and thanks for the waters of life that flow in our veins, that evaporate into the clouds to fall as rain and snow, that fill the creeks and rivers that feed the delta and underground aquifers and the ocean, that bring life to us and the other animals and trees and flowers and all the plants. Even as we have mingled our waters today, so we have symbolized our gathering and return, our creation of community here at First Unitarian Universalist Church, our commitment to work together for the health of the community throughout this church year.

This water we mingle symbolizes also our awareness that water is precious, that we are fortunate to have abundant water in this part of the world. Some of us are concerned about the campaign to pull additional water out of the Delta to slake the thirst of farms and cities in Southern California. The removal of so much additional water might put the Delta at risk for salt-water encroachment and the legitimate needs of people in Southern California may not be met as well as the political and economic needs of certain interests in between anyway.

Around the world as populations have increased, ground level fresh water sources as well as underground aquifers have been depleted in many areas. In places water has become more valuable than precious metals and gems, and those who control water sources have been able to exert tremendous influence over populations needing this life sustaining fluid. The use of water to irrigate arid areas needs to be more carefully assessed to insure the fairest distribution of water to efficiently meet the food needs of populations. The use of fertilizers and pesticides is also a concern as agricultural runoff is a major source of downstream pollution.

At least until worldwide human populations begin to stabilize or decline after mid-century, wiser use of water throughout the world is critical for human health. So far water and air pollution have been treated in this country and many developed nations mostly as quality of life economic issues, while in much of the developing world they really are survival issues.

The depletion of aquifers paired with surface level water pollution around the world has particularly become a concern over the last few decades as human populations have continued to increase dramatically. Clean fresh water is very precious indeed for billions of people, not to mention all the other living beings who also need water.

As we mixed and mingled the waters of our journeys, we shared molecules of water that have traveled further than any of us in their perpetual cycles of evaporation and precipitation. These waters literally have created and sustained uncountable generations of life over millions of years. These molecules will be cycling through the earth-wide eco-system as long as this planet has an atmosphere to hold them. Even if the hydrogen and oxygen atoms that create water molecules are separated, they will form new molecules to sustain and perpetuate the cycle of life. We and every living thing are beneficiaries of the life giving gifts of water and air that the universe has created for us here on earth.

I hope that this ritual we shared today leaves us more consciously aware of our journeys and of the importance of water in our lives. The flow of our lives is both symbolically and literally dependent on the waters of life. Even if our journeys are mostly on land or through the air, we could not go far without water! A story is told of how Jesus offered to give the woman at the well living water. Theologians have pondered the meaning for centuries. Scientists analyzing data and images from Mars have concluded that it once had large amounts of surface water and some have theorized that the water on Earth might have come from Mars. The ocean depths still hold many mysteries and the great ocean storms reshape lives and continents.

May our sharing of living waters today inspire us to live meaning-filled lives, aware of the need for water justice and compassion, and grateful for the great gift of life that the waters provide!

So May it Be! Shalom, Salam, Namaste, and Amen!