

Living Water
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Today, as in many Unitarian Universalist congregations, we will begin our church year with a water ceremony. Based, perhaps, on the assumption that many of us have been away from this space during the summer months, it is by means of this “ritual” that we receive an invitation to orient ourselves once again to the meaning and purposes of this congregation. By sharing our stories, stories that include water, we will use this time and space not only to know each other better, but to re-connect.

The act of bringing water and pouring water into a common container, invites us to do more than just tell each other about our summer activities. This ceremony invites us to make deeper meaning, to create community, to form ourselves into a pool of living water.

As we share, as we mingle the waters we have gathered, our collective spirit will unfold. This ceremony invites us to refocus our orientation, to come together again as one body, to form ourselves into this fluid, living faith community.

It is fitting that we bring water. We must have water to sustain life. We must have water for cleansing. For centuries travel on rivers, canals, and oceans was the primary way people connected with each other; for commerce and trade, for learning.

The sound and sight of water inspires us, lifts the human spirit from mundane concerns to deepened awareness of that which is sacred. It is no wonder that those inclined to purify their spirits have used water to baptize, to mark themselves in ways that signify transition, change, ...re-orientation.

How have you been changed by water this summer? How have you connected or re-connected with that which is sacred by means of water? I invite you to focus your sharing with these questions...

As you know, I recently moved to Greenville. Negotiations for the house my partner and I bought came at the end of several long days. Tired and stressed, there were lots of offers and counter offers being proposed. As it turned out the final sticking point was that the sellers wanted to keep their brand new, stainless steel, ice and water dispensing refrigerator. We made our final, final offer, which included our keeping the darn refrigerator!

We felt pretty powerful when they said yes!

I have never owned one before that has ice and cold water on the door, and probably wouldn't, on my own, buy one with that feature. But I can tell you now, that during the last two weeks having instant filtered ice water has been a wonderful gift. I am aware and thankful for the luxury of cold water every day!

I know the power of water. I grew up and have lived most of my life in Florida, which is as flat as Greenville and just as drought prone. Water can refresh and renew. Too much water can be devastating. Living in the Endless Mountains of Pennsylvania for the past two years, I learned how too much water in the hills and valleys can bring just as much devastation as a storm surge over low lying land. Too much water, or too little, nature can sometimes feel like a force we cannot control no matter how hard we try.

Sometimes we realize that we have much less control than we think we do, and then we learn to co-exist with what is...

It is no wonder that water, along with fire, air and soil, has been used in religious rituals throughout the human community throughout human history. Humans have tended to worship what we have recognized as powerful, mysterious, awe-inspiring. It is in our learning to co-exist with what is, that we participate in creating what will be.

John Seed and Joanna Macy, in *Thinking Like a Mountain*, remind us:

“Water---blood, lymph, mucus, sweat, tears, inner oceans tugged by the moon, tides within and tides without. Streaming fluids floating our cells, washing and nourishing through endless riverways of gut and vein and capillary. Moisture pouring in and through and out of you, of me, in the vast poem of the hydrological cycle. You are that. I am that.”

We are water. We are a fluid community, in constant need of re-connecting with ourselves and with each other to be whole.

The French scientist/philosopher; Pierre Teilhard de Chardin in *Hymns of the Universe*, says;

“Sons and daughters of the earth, steep yourself in the sea of matter, bathe in its fiery waters, for it is the source of your life and your youthfulness.

You thought you could do without it because the power of thought has been kindled in you? You hoped that the more thoroughly you rejected the tangible, the closer you would be to spirit: that you would be more divine if you lived in the world of pure thought, or at least more angelic if you fled the corporeal? Well, you were like to have perished of hunger.

You must have oil for your limbs, blood for your veins, water for your soul, the world of reality for your intellect: do you not see that the very law of your own nature makes these a necessity for you?"

Our ritual this morning is about more than sharing stories of our travels. It is about gathering our selves together, reconnecting with each other, with that which is essential for life.

Water has the power to point to that which is sacred, to move us from one place to another.

So, may we share where we have been, who we have been. And in so doing reconnect with each other, becoming once again a congregation that moves together, that blesses each other, that drinks from living water, that offers refreshment to the world.