

Water Communion Ritual and Homily
Pouring the Waters, Mingling the Waters: We Travel Together By Water
Ingathering: October 3, 2021
Rev. Rita Capezzi—UUFM

Ritual:

Water is always moving, even when it seems to have dried up. Most of us learned in school about the water cycle—flow, from underground springs into rivulets and creeks, into rivers and tributaries, into estuaries and oceans. And evaporation, from oceans and lakes and ponds and puddles. And precipitation, rain falling from the clouds, replenishing the waters and the ground. Snow falling and melting, replenishing the waters and the ground, taken up into the plants and animals that feed our bodies. You all know what happens next!

Regardless of where water comes from, it's all been some place else, and it's all connected. We ourselves are all connected, no matter that we are not here in this Sanctuary together and no matter where the water comes from. Imagine that flow of water within you and between you and among us all. Imagine that now.

How I long for you to be in this Sanctuary with me, pouring water, mingling our waters in a common vessel. I long for you to be participating in this ritual with me. But this is what we are given to bear and endure. Or, better I think, something a Sufi friend told me recently. This life as it is right now for each of us—good or bad, ugly or indifferent—this life we are given is all means, means to learn who we are and what we are made of, to imagine who we can be better and make a better world.

Most of the water here today comes from the tap in the main floor bathroom. And the water in this jug, that comes from water that I boiled and saved from last year's Water Communion. I pour that now, in memory of last year's Ingathering.

I was here last year, and so was this water. I am here for all of us today, those who were here last year. Those who could not be here last year, for whatever reason. Those who didn't even know about us last year. Just for now, and in this specific ritual, I substitute in for all of us.

From the wellspring that is our religious community's capacity to endure and to thrive although so much has changed, and has had to. From the core of your strengths, your unique beingness, putting you in touch with both what hurts as well as what heals. From the wellspring that is our faith, a constant reminder, if we listen to all the drips and drops, that we are part of a life force greater than any of us individually, greater even than this community. From us, from you all, from the mystery beyond knowing of which we are a part and never apart from, from all of this I pour.

I pour this water for all of you in physical space east of the Fellowship.

I pour this water for all of you south of the Fellowship.

I pour this water for all of you west of the Fellowship.

I pour this water for all of you north of the Fellowship.
Space is not distance, when I pour the water.

I pour this water for the tired ground and the scorched seed. I pour this water for you who feel withered and dry, brittle and hard.

I pour this water for you who gives solace to those in pain that they might feel the healing of water.

I pour this water for you who are angry and bitter of this distance and the isolation.

I pour this water for you who are the asayquaya ['acequia'], the mother ditch, carrying the water that grows connection and relationship.

I pour this water for you who are mourning loss, mourning change that you cannot control.

I pour water for you, a battered vessel, who sits with those sad and mourning, willing to witness the pain that can't be soothed.

Our different ways of living in this reality, living this life, they do not distance us from each other, when I pour water.

I pour water for you, those strong and forceful like a waterfall in the face of difficulty, and for you, those buoyant like a salt lake, holding others aloft.

I pour for you, those subtle and slow, persistent like drops in finding new pathways among crevices, and for you, like streams tenaciously finding your way down and around every obstacle you face.

I pour water for you, still and calm like the pond offering radiant peace, and for you, like a vast well offering a glimpse of hidden depths of feeling.

I pour water for you, soothing like the steam rising from a cup of tea, softening and smoothing the edges of challenges like a creeping fog.

I pour water for you, dissolving stubborn muck, like water left in a pot to soak.

I pour water for you, clearing away distraction like a cleansing rain.

I pour water for you, rolling with the ebb and flow like the ocean waves.

I pour water for all you, for all of us, the many waters of this community. We need each of your power, each of your resilience, each of your love to make us whole.

And I pour for the one who stores the water, who protects the water, who blesses it, the one who pours it.

May the waters of the world, the waters of life, fill us, sustain us, and carry us, with the life abundant. May we sustain each other and this religious community.

Homily:

We did not gather water from you this year, but we all lived our lives intimately connected to it anyway. We cannot live without water. As you think about the places where you have encountered water, you know it is all connected. From a lake up north, or an ocean a 1000 miles away, from the Blue Earth River flowing just below the hill the Fellowship sits on to the Danube or the Nile or the Congo. It doesn't matter where you traveled or if you did not, whether the water comes from distant place full of beauty and love important to you or from the ordinary plumbing of your everyday lives. All of it, all that water, is ultimately connected—to the present as well as to the past. And the water intimates a future that we can only imagine but which we will not live within. No, we did not gather water this year, but we all lived our lives intimately connected to it anyway, and intimately connected to each other even if we don't always realize that connection.

Water is always moving, even when it seems to have dried up. Most of us learned in school about the water cycle—always flow, from underground springs into rivulets and creeks, into rivers and tributaries, into estuaries and oceans. And evaporation, from oceans and lakes and ponds and puddles. And precipitation, rain falling from the clouds, replenishing the waters and the ground. Snow falling and melting, replenishing the waters and the ground, taken into the plants and animals that feed ours bodies. You all know what happens next!

Flow, evaporation, precipitation, all enabled by the actions of the sun, so far beyond us and so relevant to life. We travel together on this flow. Some water diverted by dams and canal locks, by irrigation and tiling, by erosion and stagnation, by ingestion and flushing toilets. Diverted but not ultimately impeded. Even when we are not aware of it, our living is tangled up with and ultimately impossible without the water cycle. Maybe you are feeling thirsty now. Have a glass of water from your tap. Marvel at your ease of access, knowing that the sanitary system will ensure that the water going down the drain become drinkable in some future time.

I read an article the other day about COVID-19 showing up in waste water, an indicator beyond nasal swab testing, revealing the amount of the disease still in our region. It's high. And I marvel at the ingenuity of those who figured out to test the sewage, creativity in the midst of challenge and fear. The disease, the waste water, these are not usually the kinds of symbols we use to show how inevitably interconnected we are, but there it is, we are. No, **we** did not gather water this year, but we all lived our lives intimately connected to each other even if we don't always realize that connection.

After each year that I have been here among you, called as your minister, I have filled little jars with smooth glass blops and water from the previous year's Water Communion. So far, I've made three jars

for you, marking three years I have been among you. They are meant to symbolize our time together in shared ministry, a visible, tangible sign that we are connected even when it seems we are not. These jars are here for you at the Fellowship, whenever you return. But this year's jar contains no smooth glass blobs. Instead, I added sharp little stones with the water.

James Luther Adams is widely regarded as the greatest Unitarian Universalist theologian of the 20th century. He identified what he called the "Five Smooth Stones" of liberal religion. The symbolism for him came from the stones David used in his slingshot when he battled Goliath in the story from the Hebrew Bible. Adams's touchstones:

- "Revelation is continuous." We keep learning about God or whatever you understand as sacred or ultimate. We keep learning about life as we go along.
- "Relationships ought to rest on mutual and free consent." No one should be abused or coerced. No one has to earn their way into relationship by a doctrinal test.
- "We need to work together to create a just and loving community." Lone rangers and saviors are not going to cut it. We need a bunch of us.
- "We have a commitment to express our faith in society." Our values and our principles save ourselves and must also be used as gifts to make the world better.
- "We choose to live in hope." No matter that we are challenged and that we struggle. No matter that the world is in a total uproar, we live empowered by creative possibility. We have not seen it all or understood it all. When people of diverse experience work together for a common purpose, we can make good in the world. We are connected to something among us and yet beyond, a growing and a possibility that we can't always see but we do perceive when we seek it.

I think Adams called his stones smooth, because they are the sorts of ideas you have to keep running your thoughts and feelings over, as you would eventually smooth the edges of a jagged rock with the persistent rubbing of your fingers. We make the stones smooth as we take these ideas and really work over them, giving them serious consideration, because they start out as jagged stones, hard to handle.

- "Revelation is continuous," yet we often think we have all the answers.
- "Relationships ought to rest on mutual and free consent," yet we are often pushy rather than invitational.
- "We need to work together to create a just and loving community," yet that "together" part is especially difficult when we are pushy with our right answers and other people just don't seem to get it.
- "We have a commitment to express our faith in society," yet we struggle to find the time or to work against our own private inclinations.
- "We choose to live in hope," yet hope can be so hard to find when the world is a mess and we are so sad.

Yes, there is always a caveat to Adams's smooth stones, really jagged stones. Can we make them smooth? Can we truly make these stony sayings smooth with our effort and our willingness? Well, for certain we cannot live into the promises, the practices, the challenges of our Unitarian Universalist faith if we do not help each other. We are called to gather in hope, to bring our principles and values into

action to create just and loving community. Let us do this together, always starting anew in any time and season. Let us do this as water does, always in a cycle, always mingling and merging.

Black, Queer teacher and shamanic practitioner Langston Kahn conveyed this way in a “Deep Liberation Conversation” on the Embodiment Matters podcast. His words:

“Drip, Drip, Drip, Drip
Everything starts right here with one drop of water
A waterfall, a roaring river, a rainstorm
It all starts with one falling drip and another and another
Water doesn’t stop to ask “Will I be loved if I fall off this precipice?”
“Will I be isolated and alone if I emerge from this cool dark crevice?”
“Will I dry up and die and cease to exist if I leave the soft expanse of the sky and fall to earth?”
Water doesn’t stop to worry and wonder
Water simply flows, opens, expresses, moves
Down, down, down
Drip, drip drip
Finding the lowest point, the deepest expression possible
Slowly, consistently drip by drip giving life to the world
Take the first step and the next
Trust, open, flow
Grow larger
The ocean is waiting, the world needs you.”

So end his words, an invitation to flow together, to travel together as a people, a reminder that we live our faith, we smooth the jagged stones, when we face reality and open ourselves to possibility and creativity, together, always together. May we all be so guided, as you remember, today and every day, that you are loved, you are worthy, you are welcome, and you are needed. May you feel it so, may it be so, and may you say with me “Amen.”