

2004-09-12: Water Sunday

The Readings for the Day

First Reading Rain in Summer

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

(Offertory tune a musical response to this poem)

How beautiful is the rain!
After the dust and heat,
In the broad and fiery street,
In the narrow lane, How beautiful is the rain!

How it clatters along the roofs,
Like the tramp of hoofs!
How it gushes and struggles out
From the throat of the overflowing spout!
Across the windowpane
It pours and pours, And swift and wide,
With a muddy tide, Like a river from the gutter roars The rain, the
welcome rain!

In the country, on every side,
Where far and wide,
Like a leopard's tawny and spotted hide,
Stretches the plain,
To the dry grass and drier grain
How welcome is the rain!

The Second Reading

Gertrude Atherton, *The Conqueror* (1902)

The only two good words that can be said for a hurricane are that it gives sufficient warning of its approach, and that it blows from one point of the compass at a time.

The Talk

The poem by Longfellow, who was a 19th Century Unitarian poet, tells us that when the water comes in the form of rain, the ground welcomes it. The people welcome it. The dry grass welcomes it.

But our second reading reminds us that water in the form of wind-blown rain is not *always* welcome...our friends in Florida know that the water and wind can rip off their roofs, and blow their houses away. My aunt Nancy, mother of my cousin Sergio, watched tiles blow off her roof, and I assure you, this did not make her happy.

So water can be gentle and welcome. Or it can be hurtful and unwelcome. Whether it's snow, or ice, or steam, or a river, or a storm...it can bless or it can curse.

Human beings, who are made of water, almost 70%, are, not surprisingly, much like the water from which they are woven. We can do good, and we can do harm.

Our calling as liberal religious people is to do as much good as we can as a sign of who we want to be. And so when we realize that only 1 % of the world's water is available to humanity (the rest being locked up in the poles or salty oceans), the good we are called to do is to protect that small bit of water so that everyone has a right to his or her share. When we realize that, even of that 1%, almost a third can be dangerous to drink because of toxins and disease, our call becomes even louder.

The call, like water itself, comes to everyone, no exceptions. Makes no difference what they believe or don't believe. Makes no difference if they are nice or kind of mean. Makes no difference if they are men or women or children. Makes no difference at all. Our Unitarian Universalist Service Committee is focusing on water for the coming years. They are going to help us understand how to be good human beings and to share and conserve water despite the unfair politics in

our world, where the “haves” do indeed have water (more than their share), and the “have-nots” don’t.

I praise this work of our Service Committee. The Water Ceremony today reminds us that water belongs to the whole round world, not just to us. And then, in our church, at the end of the ceremony, we pour the gift of the world’s water back into the earth, in our Scatter Garden, returning a portion of what we have received as a sign of our commitment to live a just life.

May we remember, always, never to take water for granted, and to offer thanks and praise whenever we drink, whenever we bathe, whenever we water our flowers, or cook our food. Blessed be the water that is our lives.

Offertory:

As waters mingle to make a sea filled with life
and beauty and nourishment and mystery,
so may our gifts mingle to help create a community of life, of beauty,
of nourishment and mystery.

Thanksgiving Prayer For the Pouring of Water

Four children and/or teens take pitchers marked east, north, south and west, and take their stations around a round table with a central bowl. As the minister speaks the name of their direction, and after they have spoken their invocation, they slowly pour the water into the common bowl. A minister enters the pulpit and begins.

(minister) We celebrate the Water Ceremony to remember that we are not just individuals who gather under a lovely wooden ceiling, but a growing community in a world of communities, one of many, all

different. But here and now we give thanks that only *together* do they make a world.

We celebrate the Water Ceremony
at the beginning of the church year
to remember that we are forever beginners,
just as the widest river in the world
still has the waters of its original source
flowing within it.

We celebrate the Water Ceremony
to remember what we have learned
in the school of Life,
that we who live on earth are mostly made
of water, that we who live on earth came originally from the water,
and that we who live on earth
move strongest when we flow freely.

We celebrate the Water Ceremony to remember
that water is precious, and more than precious;
that only one percent of all the water on earth is
available to us, and that water belongs to everyone,
not just those who can afford it.

Therefore, let us bless.
(teen or child) **East**

**Waters of the East,
flow into this place, our home,
as a promise of the right to clean water,
as an emblem of justice,
as an act of peace.**

(minister) Flow, waters of the world,
living waters, into this our common home.

Flow, waters from the far, far East,
from Japan, from the Uzushio or Waterpools
at Naruto Straights on the salty shore of the Inland Sea, Flow, waters,
from the Buddhist Temple pools of Thailand and the Hindu Temple
in Singapore dedicated to a goddess of health, and from the shallow
waters of the Black Sea, into which the Danube pours,
and water from the warmer Mediterranean,
near Italia; and flow waters from technicolor Tallinn,
and domed St.Petersburg; from the Baltic touched by
Helsinki and Stockholm, and Copenhagen,
and waters from Kent, England,
blessed by three thousand years of human lives;
and flow waters from the great rivers of Europe,
Moselle, Saar, Rhine, Orne and Seine,
and water from the Zuider Zee,
and from the historic shore of Normandy;
and from the ice-cold fiords and peaks of Norway, several pourings
from several people, all redolent of family and heritage;
and from the wind-churned Irish Sea; and on this side of the pond,
from the coast of Maine, from Boothbay Harbor, and Penobscot Bay,
and the shore around Blue Hill, Arcadia and Freeport, and
Anasagunticook Lake, and many waters from Provincetown in Cape
Cod, where two men are legally married, and two women stand up for
two women, and where people vacation and swim and play and are
thankful for the possibilities, and remember poignantly with the
scattering of ashes; from the wide sandy shores of Rehobeth Beach, in
Delaware, and Bethany Beach nearby; in Washington D.C. along the
Potomac, and from the Reflecting Pool, where women from around
the country marched for their lives, and where a family first vacations
together amid the beautiful monuments from Kiawah Island off the
Carolinas, site of Porgy and Bess's picnic, and a young nephew's
boogie-board antics; and water from the Atlantic at Edisto. Water
from West Virginia in Parkersburg, water from a birdbath...and the
meeting of waters; and from Marietta, where the oldest Unitarian
Universalist church west of Boston thrives; water from Sunnyhill, and

the Young Adult Dance that brimmed with memories of rivers and the confluence of lives; and from Lake Geneva, where a mother helped her daughter start on a grand adventure, water.

(teen or child) **Bless us, waters, and bring us home.**

(teen or child) **South:**

**Waters of the South,
flow into this place, our home.
as a promise of the right to clean water,
as an emblem of justice,
as an act of peace.**

(minister) Flow, waters of the world, living waters, into this our common home. Flow, from sky-high Lima, Peru, and from the Napo River as it flows into the Amazon, and from the ancient cataracts of Machu Pichu in the wrinkled mountains; and warm coastal water from San Pedro in Belize, where lovers of 32 years reveled in the iridescent sun, kaleidoscope flowers and Mayan culture; pour, water, from Costa Rica, water floating the long green serpent of the crocodile, flow, water, from Mexican Tepecxitle, where a student learns the living tongue of the ancient Aztecs, Nahuatl. Flow water, from the Caribbean; from the Bahamas, at Freeport, and from Santiago in the Dominican Republic, and flow from the tears of joy shed at a wedding in St. Croix. Flow from Rio El Fuerte in the United States of Mexico, and from the south of New Mexico, water from the Ruidoso River where a family gathers and sails homemade boats on the currents; and from the Gulf Coast of Mexico. Flow water from the Saint George Island off Florida's Gulf Coast, and from the wildlife preserves on Sanibel; flow from Pompano Beach, Florida, where sisters vacation and remember together, from the wind-whipped source of Hurricane Frances in Florida, where a vacation is distorted by a storm; from Lake Hickory in South Carolina, and

Topsail, North Carolina, where a number of people both vacationed and remembered, and from the blue-tinged Smoky Mountains, echoing with Cherokee songs still; and inland water from Mechanicsburg in Virginia, and from a 50th anniversary in southern Ohio, where a daughter raises her cup in thanks for her parents, from glacier carved Ash Cave in the Hocking Hills, where water drops 10 stories into a tiny pool below, and from the State Park there, water gathered at Rock House on a walk there; water from Salt Fork State Park where skipping stones celebrate a wedding anniversary, and from Camp Molly Lauman where a young woman learns about leadership; and from lower Clintonville, where a piece of sky and the rising moon alternated turns on a summer stage; and finally, from a water-bed in a home south of this building, where a church family grieves a deep loss.

(Teen or child) **Bless us waters, and bring us home.**

(teen or child) **West**

**Waters of the West,
flow into this place, our home.
as a promise of the right to clean water,
as an emblem of justice,
as an act of peace.**

Flow waters of the world, living waters, into this our common home. Flow, from Southern California; water from the faucet in a long cabin in the Alabama Hills by Mount Whitney, and from Los Angeles, water from a spa in a cousin's home, and from Long Beach, water from the ocean close to where General Assembly was held this year, and a wonderful wedding, too; and water from the Central Coast, from Nephethé at Big Sur, and from post-card quaint Carmel-by-the-Sea. And flow, water from San Francisco, pastel city on the bay, home of friends and family and beautiful bridges; flow, water, from the creek that parts a majesty of soaring redwoods, redwoods

crowded with tourists; flow, water from Chaos Lake in Lassen Park, where 3 brothers find peace at last; and water from the Pudding River in Oregon. And water from the Pacific Northwest, from Eid inlet in Olympia, Washington, near the home of former member Linda Koran, who helped dig oysters and clams with a friend from this church; and from Cowichan Bay on Vancouver Island; and water from sparkling Seattle, Bellevue, and majestic Vancouver set against a perfect range of mountains. Flow from Cliff Springs on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, and from the Colorado River at its bottom, and from Mesa Verde, from the great cliff erosions where the Ancestral Pueblans gathered their water.

Flow from rivers in Montana and Wyoming where a family explores the culture of the Native Americans amid the vast distances and high peaks of the West. Flow, water from Steamboat Springs, Colorado, and from Golden, where a member of Jefferson Church who has moved here, brings water saved from 15 years of Water Ceremonies there; and water from under the blue dome of sky blessing Smith Center, Kansas. Pour out from the rivulets rushing down Mt. Rushmore, which remembers the days when politics was not ashamed of inclusivity and ethical grounding. And flow, water, from the Mississippi, near Hannibal, land of Huck Finn and the Effigy Mounds; pour out from a Qabalistic retreat in Indiana, and flow, water, flow like rain which fell on the grave of a well-remembered mother; water, too from Indian Lake, where a family reunion in August shows how a diverse group of ages and kinds belong together deeply. Pour, waters from Yellow Springs, as the Little Miami river reflects bicyclists. Flow waters, from a new condo just a stone's throw from this place, where a new life establishes itself day by day, and from a creek near another new house on the West Side, where a young niece splashes in glee.

(teen or child) **Bless us, waters, and return us home.**

(teen or child) **North**

**Waters of the North,
flow into this place, our home.
as a promise of the right to clean water,
as an emblem of justice,
as an act of peace.**

Flow, waters of the world, living waters, into this our common home. Flow from Turnagain Arm, an arc of water visible from Anchorage Alaska, where mother and son weave family tighter; pour out of the glaciers in Alberta's Columbia Ice field; flow, water from St. Paul Minnesota, where the Mississippi is narrow for riverboats, and the weddings are beautiful. Flow, waters, from the St. Lawrence by Montreal, where the combined choirs may even have bested the legend of the angels; and from Middlebury in Vermont, home of language study and green mountains, as well as from a lake in New Hampshire; flow from Buffalo, from the faucet of a large prairie-style home by Wright himself; and flow, water from the great swoop of Georgian Bay, by Tobermory, Canada; pour out, water from Ice Lake on Manitoulin Island; and waters from Lake Charlevoix in Michigan, where 29 family members met and wove their stories; and water from Lake KewoGowan, near Grand Rapids, where members of several church families celebrated a renewal of vows for a 50 year couple; flow, water, from Manistee National Forest in Ludington, and Midland, Michigan, garlanded for weddings; and water from a womyn's music festival in Michigan, and from Ann Arbor, where a mother drops her son off to a different life at a demanding university. Flow water, from all five of the Great Lakes, as members of a family flow together. Flow, water from the mirror of Lake Mendota in Madison, and from Chicago, taken from the lake and river there, and rain on a tent, that eventually meandered down into the Platte; water from the Avon River in Stratford, Canada, where a quartet of church

women have, through the magic of theatre, afternoon tea with the Bard himself; come, water from Lake Erie, from its outer shore and from the shore on Kelly's Island, fill our common bowl. Flow, water from Youngstown, from Meander Dam. Pour out from Cazenovia, and from Hubbard, where a son contemplates the death of his father. Flow from Sancus Blvd, where new job greets a man who so desires work.

And here in Columbus, right here, right around us all, flow as tears of sorrow, for the loss of longtime friends, for those who suffer serious illness, for lost jobs, and moving friends, and the end of relationships, and the unending sadness of the world. But right here, right in Columbus, flow also as tears of joy for the weddings, the lovemaking, the births, the summer visits, the new jobs, the sense of renewed vigor, the greener grass and bright, less humid days. Flow water, and fill our spirits with praise and love and seal our community in peace.

(teen or child) **Bless us, waters, and bring us home.**

(minister) From ocean, mountain snowflake, river, and prairie lake, from sea and forest pond, from faucet and waterbed and the corner of a weeping eye, the waters find their center in this place.

May we also, so much like this water, moving and changing and flowing, find our peace in this place.
Blest is the life we share. Amen.

After the closing hymn and blessing, and the choir elegy, a minister lifts bowl and carries it outside to the garden, as all who have lost a loved one to death during the last year follow and gather round. One minister reads a reading from the hymnbook, and then the other says:

Memorial Prayer:

And now, before the witness of sun and
moon, star and sky, flower and root,
leaf and branch, and in the presence of the
Spirit of Love, behold, we return to the earth a portion of what we
have received from it, water to water as dust to dust;
Oh be praised, You who sign our lives with love.
Be praised for this moment which shapes our grief
and holds our hands. For the lives we have known,
and the love that has blest us, may we ever
give thanks. As loss comes to every person,
so thanksgiving must also come to every person:
thanksgiving for those whose image
we carry forever into our hearts.
Oh be praised, You who sign our lives with love,
You whom no one can name or claim,
Mystery that blends life and death in the eyes of love.
Amen. Praise be to you, Love, our means and our end.

extempore charge or blessing, embraces.