

## **2005-9-11 The Water Ceremony**

Mark Belletini

### **Opening Words**

We are here  
*to celebrate life,*  
on a sunny morning  
**with water and welcome,**  
with care and compassion,  
*with ourselves and each other.*

And so we begin together:

**Mindful of the responsibility our freedom presses into us, blest by  
the beauty of the world,  
and drawn by a vision of a community  
known for its honesty, generosity, depth  
love and justice work,  
we focus our time together with the kindling of light.**

### **Teacher Dedication:**

I am Cindy Dillard. I am one of your Directors of Religious Education,  
along with Rachel Tayse Baillieul.

One of the things that marks our humanity  
is our ability to learn, to grow, to use our mind and heart  
to make the world a better place.

This learning happens in schools, and it happens  
here among the people of this congregation.

Starting next week, our children will attend classes on Sunday after they  
leave our celebration. They will learn about life and love and sorrow and

about our heritage as a free religious people. They will learn about great teachers from the past,  
and they will learn about themselves, too. They will ask questions and tell stories and make things with their hands.  
They will do this in the presence of teachers.

Members of the congregation in part show love for our children by saying “yes” when asked to teach in our school. It is a commitment of time and a commitment of learning, for teachers are students, too.

And so I will ask that all who are teaching this year in our Sunday School might rise, that we might acclaim you as you begin your good year.

### **Poem on 9/11**

The towers fell that day.  
The towers fell like dusty toys.  
And hearts fell to the floor that day.  
They stopped beating for a moment;  
and mouths opened, some to shout,  
and some to simply imitate the wide eyes above them.  
And then it was, surprised, angry,  
undone, shattered, that we remembered  
that most of what we think we know  
is just air  
just as most of what we are,  
they say, is just water,  
And that we forget how easy it is for water  
to drip through the fingers of someone’s hands.  
And we forget how often the great words  
and great ideas and great books and great human beings  
can float down like dust on those currents of air  
which we still breathe in to this day.  
How fragile we are, this air, this water,

little dancing fires easily flickering,  
little clods of earth bent over the clay that is our being.  
How fragile we are.  
And yet, when we have yielded  
the air of our invulnerability, and the water of our tears,  
when we have stopped going out on dates with our fears,  
we yet might come to know the knowledge worth knowing;  
that it's love for each other and for our common world  
that is solid and cannot fall; that it is learning to love even our own  
fragility that will not fail us, and that it is learning to unlearn all that ties  
us into knots on top of towers  
that will set us free.

### **An Intergenerational Homily “Giving Something Back”**

When someone gives me a gift, I sometimes want to give a gift back.  
Oh, maybe I have to wait until their birthday comes around to do that.  
But it's rare that I get a gift and do not give some kind of a gift back, if I  
can.

Water is a gift. It is a very precious gift too. Precious like a beautiful  
baby or a wonderful puppy. Precious like a friend, or anyone who loves  
you.

Why is water such a precious gift? Because it is so rare. Oh yes, I know,  
most of our world seems to be covered with water. But only one percent  
of that is fresh water. And only one percent of that one percent is  
available for us to use. So you can see that water is very, very precious.

It takes a lot of water to make things we like to eat. For example, every  
time you eat a piece of toast for breakfast, try to remember that it took  
40 gallons of water to help the wheat which makes the bread grow in the  
first place. It takes 400 gallons of water to produce a one pound box of  
sugar. And almost a whole ton of water...2650 gallons of water to  
produce a pound of coffee.

We use a lot of water. The gift that is water. And as I said, when we receive a gift, we might want to give a gift back, and make a circle of giving and receiving.

But how can we do that? Especially when water is not always a gift. Like when it washes away lives and cities and hopes, like it did down in the American South, like it did over in Rumania, where our sister and brother Unitarians lost their villages and churches and lives to huge floods.

Well, first I think it's important to remember that we ourselves are mostly made of water, according to women and men of science. Did you know that? I know we don't look like a river or lake, but most of our bodies are made of water.

But we are different than most water in the world. We have a brain. Regular water doesn't have a brain. Lakes and rivers and oceans don't have a heart. We do. Regular water has no mind nor any heart, and so, pushed by the mindless wind, it destroyed the city of New Orleans last week, as all of you know. The water didn't know it was doing that. It just followed the mindless wind, and whoosh, the city was washed away, and many people have lost their lives. And many more lost homes and their work and their dreams and even their memories. This is one of the times when water is not a gift.

Now mostly, water is a gift. It helps us grow our food. It helps us stay clean. It helps quench our thirst. It doesn't know it is doing that, but that does not mean it's not a gift. It is. Water is precious, and fragile and rare, just like we are.

And so, to give back a portion of what we have been given means that we, we creatures of water, have to use our brain and heart to respond to the disasters that mindless and heartless water has brought to our sisters and brothers, both here in the United States, and in other places like Romania.

Also, as living water with brains and heart, we have to respond to the unhappy truth that some people don't receive the gift of water, they take it. Remember, there is not very much usable water in the whole world. One percent of one percent. In this country, we each use an average of 180 gallons of water a day. In Africa, they only use 8 gallons of water per day. And that is not fair. To give back something of what we have been given is to use our brains and our hearts to make sure that others have enough to drink, and that it is good water, not bad water that will make you sick. The gift of water is for everyone, not just a few.

So water is mostly precious. And we are mostly precious too. The main difference is that we know what we are doing, and ordinary water doesn't. We have brains and hearts...ordinary water does not. And so on this day when we remember the sad things water can do, we also remember the good things water can do...especially through us. So every time you drink a bit of water, really appreciate that water. Really be glad about that water. And be glad about what you can do to give back what you can.

All of us are fragile compared to the raging water that destroys cities. But we are strong when we band together to do good work to help the people in those cities. And we are strong when we band together to make sure that everyone has enough good water to drink, clean, fresh and delicious, a gift to the world.

As the story said this morning, "We belong where we are going."  
And we are going out into the world to give gifts in return for all that we have received.

### **Offertory:**

When we give, we receive too, for all good gifts make a circle  
and come back round again.

## WATER CEREMONY

**Mark:** “Many will come from north, south, east and west” (Luke 13;29) and so we are here, the new church year beginning afresh as we all flow like streams into the great river of the coming year. We too, are of water, and flow.

**Wendy:** Our beginnings are in water.

Our remote ancestors came from the water, struggling onto the dry land.

Our beginnings are in water.

Within our mothers’ bodies we floated in water.

Our beginnings are in water.

Our lives flow like water.

We are not rocks in the stream of life,

but the stream itself flowing to its completion.

### 1. East Waterpourer:

*Say “**Waters of the East, flow into this place, our home, as a promise of the right to clean water, as an emblem of justice, and as an act of peace.**” then, pour water *s l o w l y* into the bowl as the minister reads about Eastern waters.)*

<b>EAST</b>
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Behold, water now flows from the east into our common home: waters from the great ancient city of Ephesos, on the coast of Turkey, glowing with beautiful ruins; waters from a natural spring on an island in the river Duna, near Buda Pest Hungary, where both family and world history were made; and water flows from the Elbe, not far from Berlin, Germany: on this river a family sails the Clara Schumann and weaves closer; and water from Sicilia, gathered with some stones from great Mt. Etna, and water from fabled Rome, where a family explores its wild traffic and noble ruins, and from Firenze, Italia, where a couple relive their meeting and falling in love there years ago, and from the

hills of Tuscany near the vineyards of Montepulciano; and water from the Mediterranean Sea from near the island of Sitges, off the coast from Barcelona, Spain where partners in life enjoy a time in the sun; and water from Fatima, Portugal where a woman visits her childhood spiritual roots with both joy and sadness, and water from the Lake District near Windermere where the poet Wordsworth once strolled; and across the pond, water from Ogunquit in Maine, and from nearby Boothbay Harbor, where a family celebrated; and water from the Cape in Massachusetts, where a family vacation for the first time since the arrival of their second child, and waters from historic Walden Pond, Thoreau's famous lake, where our Coming of Age class learned of their New England heritage, and from Vermont, where an attentive grandmother watches her two grandsons play in front of the recently purchased yellow house; and from Virginia, where a woman visits her nieces and nephews from Thailand, and water from charming Annapolis, taken from the sprawling Chesapeake Bay, and from the Potomac River near DC where one family celebrates a 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, and also, where a family heirloom exchanges hands once again; and flow now waters from perfectly clear Lake Geneganset in New York as well as from the Outer Banks in the Carolinas where a family celebrates life, including a wedding; and water flows from the Savannah River in Hilton Head, and water from a park in West Virginia where a friend found refuge with a good friend, and water from Moundsville, West Virginia, where a man enjoys the company of new friends in the high woods, and water from Pittsburgh, where, at a conference, the lights went out in a charming gingerbread church, and the work got done by candlelight, and water from Newark's Cherry Valley Lodge, and water at last from Adena Creek, just down Cooke Rd, where a family looked for crayfish in waters named after the ancient people who lived here. Waters of the world, waters of life and healing, flow to us from the East.

(Waterpourer) **Bless us, waters, and bring us home.**

## **2. South Waterpourer:**

*(Say aloud: Say “Waters of the South, flow into this place, our home, as a promise of the right to clean water, as an emblem of justice, and as an act of peace.”*

*and then begin to pour water s l o w l y into the bowl as the minister speaks of Southern waters.)*

## **SOUTH**

Flow, warm waters from the South, from the emerald Caribbean Island of St. John where a man relaxes from hard work, and from the teal waters of Cancun, Mexico where a couple breathe in the cumin-scented air, and from the Yucatan, where a couple perfects their scuba diving, and most poignantly on this day, water from Atchafalaya Basin System in Louisiana, once filled with hyacinths and alligators, and water from the now devastated city of New Orleans (pause) and water from General Assembly in Fort Worth and a retreat center in Dallas, and from lovely San Antonio and the bend of the Rio Grande in West Texas, and water from the Carolinas, from Cape Hattaras near the lighthouse illuminating memories, and from the waves of Devil Hill Beach, where friends play in the surf, and flow, water, from Lake Hope, Ohio where a families from the School for Young Children camp and take delight, and camp Molly Lauman where a young woman learns about life, and water from a spring by the side of the road in the Hocking Hills, Ohio, and water from the church camp where people come to know each other, hour by hour, and water from a water fountain at the great university just a few miles south of here, where a man enjoys the joy of being able to teach, and finally, more water from that same campus, where an internship at OSU Hospitals fills a chaplain with insight, challenge and growth. Waters of the Earth, waters of life and healing, flow into us from the South.

(Waterpourer) **Bless us Waters, and bring us home.**

### **3. West Waterpourer:**

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

*and then begin to s l o w l y pour water into the bowl as the minister speaks of water from the south.)*

## WEST

Flow water from so far west that west becomes east: water from temples in far Japan, Byodoin in Kyoto, and from Kastuoji, and from the hospital room of a dying father in Osaka, town of Suita and water from the crystal warm waters of the Hawaiian Islands, from the mountainous Big Island, and the curve of Hilo Bay, from Lanikai Beach where friends of one who grew up there now live, from the garden island of Kauai, Hanalei, and the beautiful bay at Maui and Honahunau Bay on the Big Island And water from luscious wine centers of Napa Valley and the from under the dark green Redwoods in California, and from the beach at Pt. Reyes national seashore on the Pacific, and from Sky Rose Chapel in Whittier, brought by a woman grieving for the loss of her son: and water from the snowmelt on Mt. Whitney in Southern California, where a man climbs toward the heights he desires: and from perfectly blue Lake Tahoe, the jewel of the Sierra, where spouses and friends hiked and biked and swam and rose in the air on kites pulled behind speedboats, and where others ballooned over that lovely lake.

And flow, water from Gearhart, west of Portland, Oregon, and from the Umpqua River, and from the Elk River on the Southern Oregon coast where hikers grin from ear to ear; and water from beautiful Portland, itself, water taken from a Water Ceremony that happened there, water from over 30 states as well as Canada; and flow water from the Platte as a family visits Washington and Oregon following the Lewis and Clark Trail; And water from La Push, Washington, where a former member and a present one walked the ocean beach in friendship, and from Lake Sutherland, not far from there; water from the Sawtooth Mountains, Idaho and the jagged and wild Snake River, also in Idaho.

And flow, water from the Rio Grande near Albuquerque and Santa Fe, where 30 friends from around the world met with tenderness and joy and not a little love; And flow, water from Firehole River in Yellowstone Park, where a family enjoys the glories of that perfect park.

And flow, water from Yeoman Park Campground in western Colorado in the towering Rockies, where a family who lived near there for many years enjoyed camping; and flow water from a YMCA Camp near

Winter Park, Colorado, and from Estes Park, Colorado where a couple submerge in the words of Vietnamese Buddhist Monk and sage, Thich Nhat Hanh, and from a family reunion on the familiar rolling plain of Kansas; and flow, waters from the west end of Tennessee, Hurricane Mills, where a grandmother proudly watches her son compete in the National Motorcross, at Loretta Lynn Ranch. And water from Lake Michigan off Saugatuck where friends converged in joy; and flow, water from Indiana where a retreat soothes the spirit. And water from the Little Miami River in Spring Valley, Ohio where waters once reflected both the face of Daniel Boone and great Tecumseh. And water from the west bank of the Scioto River where Ohio where a husband and wife found a special house set among the trees, made gold by the setting sun to raise their children. Waters of the Earth, waters of life and healing, flow into our lives from the West.

(Waterpurer) **Bless us waters and bring us home.**

#### **4. North Waterpurer:**

(Say: **“Waters of the North, flow into this place, our home, as a promise of the right to clean water, as an emblem of justice, and as an act of peace.”** and then begin to s l o w l y pour the water into the bowl as Wendy speaks of western water.)

<b>NORTH</b>
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Flow icy cold water, from fifteen thousand year old ice from Vatna Glacier, Iceland, a land where a professor teaches in the new Ph.D program, and flow, waters from New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia from the fabled Bay of Fundy with the highest tides in the world; and flow icy cold water from Fairbanks Alaska And flow, water from the northern towns of Minneapolis and Oberlin where empty nesters visit their grown children; and flow, waters from Kitchee Gume, the Chippewa word for Lake Superior where long time lovers and friends restored their spirits in the beauty of nature; and from Northern Michigan, Lake Bellaire, to be exact, and the woodlands near there; and from Crystal Lake where folks gather ingredients for an auction meal, and from the Lelenau Peninsula,

land of cherries, and water from the Kalamazoo River, which flowed through a peaceful week, and water from the house of now shared friends in Ann Arbor, where an intellectual journey began years ago and led a man to teaching a class at OSU, and waters from Stratford, Ontario where “The Tempest” is a new production but the friendships are old and enduring. And flow, waters from Wisconsin where two women visit a place one called home fifty years ago, and celebrate the anniversary of a friend, and canoe down the Wisconsin River:

Flow water, from great Chicago, where a couple celebrate their 40<sup>th</sup> with their grown and beloved children, and where a woman attends a conference with 50,000 people from 152 nations round the globe; and from Lake Erie where a man learns to sail, and from Youngstown, where a large, heartwarming family reunion brings joy., and from Rush Creek in Worthington, which flows past a new house of friends who are family. Waters of the earth, waters of life and healing, flow into our lives from the north.

(waterpourer) **Bless us waters, and bring us home**

**Wendy:** We are One With the Waters of Life. We too are flowing together in this season of beginnings, and for this I lift my heart in blessing and thanks. Praise for this water, sign of our beginning and ending, sign of our power to bless or curse, to heal or to harm. May our lives pour out this year for the common good, and may our lives together flow as beautiful as the sweetest stream with hanging willow branches touching the clear waters, linking earth and water and sky. May harmony prevail. May harmony prevail. May there be peace for us, and for all the people, no, all the creatures, who share the precious and common water on our beautiful, beautiful earth. Amen.

(the water is then taken out to the memorial garden where it is poured with an extempore prayer, in the presence of the actively grieving, back into the earth.)