

Rev. Linda Simmons
Water Communion Sermon
October 20, 2013

“Under various names,” wrote Czeslaw Milosz (cheslof mewosh), the Lithianian poet and prose writer, who grew up along the Neman river, “I have praised only you, rivers. You are milk and honey and love and death and dance.”

The Water Communion service originated with Carolyn McDade and Lucile Shuck Longview. They were asked to create a ritual for the Women at a Religion Conference at East Lansing, Michigan, in 1980. Their service was intended to speak to the worship needs of women, which some felt had not been widely included in our movement up to that point. As McDade, social activist and songwriter who wrote *Spirit of Life*, recalls, “It was a strong service, about community taking power...about creating a political and liberating theology.”

This “celebration of connectedness,” as McDade calls it, empowered women. The water symbolized the birth waters, the cycles of moon, tides, and all the waters of this small blue planet.

McDade recalls that “It was very moving, the women bringing water from places of spiritual importance.” This ceremony was also designed to demonstrate solidarity with women globally, as women the world over traditionally draw and carry water.

Almost thirty years after its creation, the water ritual speaks to a deepening awareness of our solidarity with brothers and sisters globally who lack the most

basic and precious resources. It also speaks eloquently of our interdependent web of life. Water carries memories—of special trips, of former homes, of places that have become holy to us. --

Writer Cathy Newman, in her essay, *Sacred Waters*, writes, “From the droplets in a baptismal font to the scattering of ashes on a holy river, water blesses our lives.”

Newman goes on, The world, Genesis says, was brought to life by a God who created a “firmament in the midst of the waters.” Babylonians believed in a world made from a commingling of fresh and salt water. Pima Indians have said Mother Earth was impregnated by a drop of water.

As Newman writes, From our worldly entrance in a burst of amniotic fluid to the ritual washing of the dead (taharah in Judaism; *ghusl al-mayyit* in Islam), water flows through our lives, scribing a line between sacred and profane, life and death. We are doused, dunked, dipped, sprinkled—and blessings flow, deep and wide as the River Jordan of Scripture, wondrous as the spring at Lourdes, cathartic as tears.

St. Francis Assisi wrote, “Be praised, My Lord, through Sister Water; she is very useful, and humble, and precious, and pure.”

Water is an essential element of life. We know how much water moves us as those who live on an island. Many of us also take summer trips to other bodies of water, and take hiking excursions that lead us along rivers.

Here is a story of one Unitarian’s journey along a river:

A Unitarian was taking a walk through the woods, admiring all that the “accident of evolution” had created. “What majestic trees! What powerful rivers! What beautiful animals!” he said to himself.

As he was walking alongside the river he heard a rustling in the bushes behind him. He turned to look. He saw a 7-foot grizzly charge towards him. He ran as fast as he could up the river path.

He looked over his shoulder and saw that the bear was closing in on him. He looked over his shoulder again, and the bear was even closer. His heart was pumping frantically and he tried to run even faster.

He tripped and fell on the ground. He rolled over to pick himself up but saw the bear right on top of him, reaching for him with his left paw and raising his right paw to strike him.

At that instant the Unitarian cried out: “Oh my God!...”

Time stopped. The bear froze. The forest was silent.

As a bright light shone upon the man, a voice came out of the sky. “You deny my existence for all of these years, teach others I don’t exist, and even credit creation to a cosmic accident. Do you expect me to help you out of this predicament? Am I to count you as a believer?”

The Unitarian looked directly into the light, “It would be hypocritical of me to suddenly ask You to treat me as a believer now, but perhaps could You make the BEAR a believer?”

“Very well,” said the voice. The light went out. And the sounds of the forest resumed. And then the bear dropped his right paw... brought both paws together and bowed his head and spoke:

“Lord, for this food which I am about to receive, I am truly thankful.”

Masaru Emoto is a Japanese energy scholar and author, and is best known for his claims that human consciousness has an effect on the molecular structure of water. Emoto’s precept is that thoughts change the shape of water. He postulates that words have vibrations and positive words have positive vibrations. He has experimented with putting words on containers of water or directing prayer to water and then freezing it and photographing it before and after.

The changes are astounding. After prayer, a clear, sharp, crystal formed in harmonious balance appears. Emoto says that we can change the world through water with prayer and good intentions and that we can also change our bodies, as we are all 70% water. The picture on the front of the order of service is a water crystal frozen after the word Harmony was spoken over it.

Water responds to vibration, says Emoto. We all respond to vibrations, positive and negative. Emoto writes that the only way to protect ourselves from negative vibrations is to practice love and gratitude. It creates a natural force field keeping the negativities that fear creates at bay. I do not know if these theories are true.

I do know that since reading his work and remembering that we are all 70% water, I have been practicing prayer and gratitude when I am afraid, afraid that I am not enough, that I do not have enough, that I am not worthy of love, and all the other fears life carries in her arms and sets before us. When I feel fear, I start saying, I am so grateful for my life, my breath, this community, this island, the water that surrounds us, the love in all our hearts, this moment, this time we share together on this planet.

Water is a symbol for all we are and all we strive to be. It is part of everything, it can bring the almost gone back to life, remind us that there is enough but if it is not shared, that there is never enough. It is fluid, open, and the comingling of many sources. It is invisible and only gains a color when set against something else.

It is the beginning, the source from which all else comes, it is reactive, vulnerable, powerful and yet so fragile. It is the symbol of all of life and the sacredness of life too. Water absorbs our sorrows, washes away our pain, blesses us, names us, absolves us and reminds us from where we come. Water may also have the power to lift us from the drama of our own lives and bring us back to each other. It is not easy to let go of our own stories, our own seeking and desiring and chasing after what we want, what we believe will bring us happiness.

Water reminds us that though it may appear we are alone, we are not. We are made of the stuff of all of life, the stuff in which we all float, together.

The water that surrounds us on Nantucket, changes us, calls us, carries our longings and our dreams. The water that surrounds us takes on our vibrations, our collective longing.

This water is colored by who we are and in turn, we take on the color, the hue, of our visions and fears, our smallness and our grandest dreams. We are made by and through each other. Water knows this.

Water asks us to risk sailing out from our shores for the adventure that awaits us, to give, to give all that we have and though it may slip through our fingers like time, it has quenched our thirst, refreshed our spirits, nourished our bodies and mind.

Sea travelers have long navigated their boats once in harbor by the gold dome of our Meeting House. We know what it means to be a place of refuge, a place where dreams can grow into reality.

I have been listening to the dreams of this community, amplified by the water that surrounds us, over these past 3 months. Here is what I have heard from all of you and what your dreams have inspired in me.

- I heard that you would like an Our Whole Lives program, the UU & UCC sexual education curriculum here in. I am a trained facilitator for this program and it will be offered to the whole community in 2014. Numbers show that youth who

engage in this training wait later to have sex, engage in safer sexual practices and know what it means to honor their own and another's body.

- I heard you say you want a social justice committee, that it matters to you that the Meeting House stands for something in the world. You told me you want to make a difference on this our island home knowing that what we change here can be a model for change in other places, knowing that being part of change anywhere feeds our souls, keeps us from despair, joins us in community in new ways, assures us of our strength and capacity to effect change so that when harder times come, we know how to go on together.

You told me you want to focus on the local issues of sustainability, affordable housing, workers rights and the national issue of gun violence. I am looking forward to the convening of our first meeting.

- I heard you say you want adult education programs so I will be teaching World Religion, Building Your Own Theology and Nonviolent Communication classes beginning in 2014.
- I heard you tell me that the winters are long and can be lonely and that you want to be part of a potluck meal once a month at the Meeting House and to have a movie night once a month too. Several members are working to make this happen.
- I heard Lora Stewart say she wants to do a prayer shawl knitting group and at least 10 of you have told me you are interested. I look forward to knitting with you.

- I heard that you say Religious Exploration matters to you and that you want a lead teacher to guide your children, nurture their curiosity and wonder. Jen Dunbar has agreed as of this past Friday to take this paid position.
- I heard that you would like your children to learn about stewardship and social justice so we ask now that they bring each Sunday something for the Food Pantry. We will be planning field trips for them to bring their offerings directly to the Food Pantry.
- I have heard you say that you want the children and youth to do decorate the room of a child who is sick in the hospital so we are in conversation with the hospital about how to make this happen.

This Meeting House is our home, our spiritual ground, our touchstone; it is our life raft. We are partners in the fate of all that happens here! Tell me what you are thinking; tell me what you want. Let's build it together!

There is enough here for all of us to thrive. We are shareholders in the future of this Meeting House. What is this place worth to you? What would you lose if it was gone? What would you give to keep it alive? Give this! Give this!

Let water teach us all about what it means to give of ourselves freely, to be fluid, to be so full of ourselves and our dreams that we know there is never less, we are never less, when we give of ourselves.

All of what we have to give is needed here. Not as a gift, but as a contribution to the very heart beat of our lives so that we may continue to thrive here and give our good work to our community, our children and our future.

May the buoy of this Meeting House carry you peacefully to all the shores of your lives.

Amen.