

Big Sky Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
Water Communion: United by Water
September 20, 2009
Worship Service led by Lynda Saul

PRELUDE

WELCOME

GREET ONE ANOTHER

CHALICE LIGHTING (All together)

Fire and water, ancient opposites. Sun and ocean, the cradle of life.
Dancing flame and dancing river — we invoke them together today
as we kindle our chalice flame.

By Laura Horton- Ludwig

OPENING WORDS #435 “We Come Together”

OPENING HYMN #100 *I’ve Got Peace Like a River*

JOYS AND CONCERNS

HYMN #123 *Spirit of Life*

OFFERING *Bridge Over Troubled Water*

Performed by Jon Cardiello and sung by Ginny Niccolucci

STORY FOR ALL AGES

Told by Alyssa Townsend-Hudders.

WISH FOR ALL CHILDREN

Go now in peace, go now in peace,
May the Sprit of Love surround you,
Every where, every where you may go.

READING “The Social Life of Water” by Toney Hoagland.

Read by Donna Davis

MESSAGE “United by Water”

MOMENT OF SILENCE

REFLECTIONS

CLOSING HYMN #1007 *There's A River Flowin' In My Soul*

CLOSING WORDS #528 *I've Known Rivers*

EXTINGUISH THE CHALICE

We extinguish this flame, but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

BSUU ANNOUNCEMENTS

Join us next Sunday at 11:30 am for worship "Autumn Equinox Lessons" led by Jan Ellen Siemers.

Fall equinox celebration led by Katie Campbell on Tuesday September 27 in the Plymouth Fireside room at 7pm. Please contact Katie for more information at katie.campbell@bresnan.net

NAMI Walk is Sunday Sept 27, gather at 12:30 pm, walk starts at 1:00 pm. The BSUU Fellowship has t-shirts to wear for this and other group events.

CLOSING CIRCLE – Shalom Havayreem

Shalom Havayreem, Shalom Havayreem, Shalom, Shalom.
Shalom Havayreem, Shalom Havayreem, Shalom, Shalom.

Salaam Alaikum, Salaam Alaikum, Salaam, Salaam.
Salaam Alaikum, Salaam Alaikum, Salaam, Salaam

Farewell dear friends, stay well dear friends
Have peace, have peace
We'll see you again, we'll see you again
Have peace, have peace.
Go in peace.

MBSUU Message – “United by Water” 9/20/09.
Presented by Lynda Saul

Reading: “The Social Life of Water” by Toney Hoagland.

Read by Donna Davis. Printed in The Sun magazine.

http://www.thesunmagazine.org/issues/405/the_social_life_of_water

Rivers, water, flow, life, love, abundance, community. Unitarian Universalist have a September church new year tradition, familiar to some and new to others. Many congregations choose a Sunday in September to honor the community coming together in a new church year through the ceremony of water communion.

Over the summer, friends and members of the congregation are encouraged to collect a bit of water from a special place –and then, during the water communion, everybody brings in their little jar or cup or bottle a sample representing water from the lake where they went camping, or the wading pool in their back yard, or their vacation to Iceland, or their garden hose where they coxed tomatoes to bear, or a visit with grandchildren, or wherever. And one by one, each person pours their little bit of water into a big bowl, so that everyone’s water is all mixed together. If you didn’t bring water, we have water up here in these cups that you can use to represent your special place, so that all present can participate. This year, we will create our water communion during our Moment of Silence. I encourage you to share with each other about your special water during fellowship after the service.

The idea of a Unitarian Universalist ritual may feel strange to some of us. We have UU theological roots that rest in the rejection of established ritual and of the authorities who controlled both the content of these rituals and the participation in them. For many people, however, rituals are concrete and meaningful expressions of joy and sorrow of life. As Unitarian Universalists we are free to create rituals and to celebrate life passages in ways we feel best express our values and our faith. The water communion provides one way to celebrate the return to community after a summer's pause.

The water communion is a relatively new ritual, as rituals go. Carolyn McDade – who is familiar to us as the author of the hymn “Spirit of Life” and Lucille Shuck Longview came up with the idea in 1980 for a Women and Religion conference, as a special way of honoring what each person brought to the gathering. Women at the conference were so moved by the way the ritual expressed how the power of each person is magnified when we all come together that they brought the idea back to their home congregations, and the practice just spread from there.

The water communion is a ritual of gathering, of bringing people together as they launch into whatever the new year might bring. And I would like to start a new BSUU ritual this year born from our water communion - of saving our community water for special fellowship celebrations. Our communion water could be used in child dedication services, ceremonies of marriage or union, memorial services, and to water a special plant that honors an individual. So throughout the

year, let me or Magalie know if you would like to use some of our BSUU communion water – to express your special ritual.

Now, I'd like to share a story of how of two members of our Fellowship are united by water.

My partner, Steve, and Walking Jim had a conversation several Sunday's ago about his walk across Nevada this summer that had him searching for water for 33 miles. The next Sunday, I followed up and asked Jim about it. He sent me an excerpt from his book, "Walking With the Wild Wind" it's about a walk he did across Idaho - running out of water. It's too long to share the whole story, but here goes a portion

1983—Snake River Plain, Idaho

<ex>Should I turn back? It's only eleven miles back to the cave.

There's water there for sure. But eleven miles? That will kill this day, and part of tomorrow. Of course, it might kill me if I don't go back.

I'm nearly out of water.

This is a fierce desert. No shade. Even the sagebrush is stunted. Hundreds of square miles of barren, open plain, lava flows and sage. I passed the last scruffy juniper a few miles back. And it's hot. July is not the greatest time to be wandering around out here.

This is crazy. But I'm walking the length of Idaho this summer.

Yesterday I did a twenty-eight-mile day to get to this wild stuff. I got what I asked for. Here it is.

.....Jim's story goes on as he wanders across lava fields and barren plain, he becomes delirious with heat exhaustion and then sick heat stroke, almost ready to lay down for good, when.

The jeep trail has become a little dirt road. Somewhere ahead of me in the glare of the afternoon, a dust cloud emerges. What I think to be a whirlwind is a weathered green pickup truck. I'm staring at it, blankly, when it pulls to a halt next to me. A lady is smiling. "You seen any cows out this way?"

My mouth is so dry, I have trouble talking. "No." It's a big effort to get that one word out. She asks what I'm doing. I offer a raspy answer, telling her. But not everything. I don't tell her about the fire and the dry well. About being so dry I'm sick. Or about the smoke and the heat and the wondering if I was going to make it or not.

She's a rancher. She's a tough, work-hardened, weathered sort. She's staring at me. Hard. Finally, she asks, "Well, do you want a lift? Arco's only fifteen miles. It'd be no trouble for me."

It'd be so easy. No trouble for me either. It's still hard for me to talk. I croak instead of speak my words. Each one is searched out, dredged up, worked hard for. My answer is a ragged whisper. "No thanks. But do you happen to have any water?"

A singer song-writer, Walking Jim is also a great story teller. While he was walking across the Snake River Plain looking for water in 1983, I was experiencing my first summer on my own. As a recent college graduate in geology from New Orleans, I picked up stakes and headed

west for the first time, to Salmon Idaho – figuring on a dry arid west. But rather than searching for water, I was immersed in it.

In May 1983 I set off on a cross country ride in a greyhound bus. Stopping for a day to witness the Wasatch Range record snowmelt transform the sandbagged State Street of Salt Lake City into a raging river. I went west hoping to get some field experience working for the BLM as Student Conservation Association volunteer. After three months of earning \$35/week and living with 5 other volunteers in a trailer on the BLM parking lot, my boss promoted me to a minimally paid position to finish out the field season. My job that summer: walking riparian areas, surveying for cattle impacts, and recommending stream section to restore and fence off. Occasionally, my mind became twisted. After battling my way through lush fortress-like willows stands buzzing with mosquitoes, or slipping and sliding over moss covered rocks, often resulting in a stream dunking, I secretly hoped for areas where cattle had camped out along the stream bank. To walk quickly in the open range, unimpeded by vegetation, unencumbered by waders. I was longing for raw, dry land.

My living arrangements had changed too. No longer a volunteer, I was kicked out of the group trailer. And not receiving a real pay check for months, I was broke. So I set up a temporary home on an island in the Salmon River. Liked it so much - I stayed. Even got mail and potluck invitations delivered to my tent. I had my bike and had picked up a used kayak. After work, my boat and I would hitchhike up river and run the Salmon down to camp. Weekly, I floated a different stretch surveying for osprey, bald eagles, and peregrine falcons. Had

they started to rebound 11 years after the banning of DDT? My 1983 Idaho was shaped by water. And water shaped me. After another 6 months of wandering the west, by boat, bike, and boot, I settled in Missoula for graduate school and changed my field of study to hydrology. A 25 year career in water resources finds me still working for wetland and river protection and every day more humbled and amazed by the life giving, connective force of water.

Twenty five years ago in Idaho, Walking Jim and I both encountered water, we and everyone and everything are "united by water" 78% of each of us humans H₂O – the same molecules, the same need, for pure clean water.

I cannot imagine the thirst and depravation he experienced. I'm sure he cannot imagine the abundance I encountered – the same year, the same state, both life experiences shaped by the same substance.

Scarcity and abundance – both opportunities to sharpen our gratitude and respect. But do we live in a way that shows our respect for water? and are we thankful for being blessed with an abundance of water in this country and in our daily lives?

I'd like to relate the unity of water to a couple of the UU principles.

We the member congregation of the UUA covenant to affirm and promote 1) The inherent worth and dignity of every person. This principle includes the right to clean healthy water.

7) Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. This principle challenges us to steward the planet's water resources for all creation.

One of the most profound experiences Steve and I shared was in East Africa witnessing the Scarcity of water. In Tanzania this meant life or death. Women and girls lining up in the pre-dawn hours w/ their 5 gallon buckets at the village well. 1 shilling (1/10 of a cent) if they have it, putting the bucket under the tap to collect drips, if not. Carrying those 40 pound buckets on their heads, some up to 3 miles, to cook for their families.

Thinking back to our 2 UU Principles, and the unity of water ... I challenge each of us to promote the inherent worth and dignity of ever person, and live in a way that respects the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

I'd like to end my Message, with these words
adapted from "Blending Our Waters"

We bring our waters, which have touched the west,
the north, the south and the east, which come from



the sky and from the earth.

We bring water that belongs to lakes and streams, reservoirs of fresh waters that quench our thirst.

We bring water that is a part of the great oceans and the seas that circle the globe, teeming with life, the source of all life.

We bring water to this place of meeting and sharing.

In this water there is new water, formed in the atmosphere daily, and there is old water, water as old as the earth, water from which life has evolved over the eons. This is the stream of life from which all life flows.

All people are connected by this stream, for it runs through our veins and courses through the stems and leaves of plants.

It is the symbol of the cleansing power of forgiveness and the faithful promise of healing love.

It is the symbol and the reality of the oneness that unites humankind and all life.

May our separate waters join into one sacred stream as we add our lives into the stream of living souls who live out love, work for justice, and hunger for peace.

Now let's share a few moments of silence as we each pour all the bits of your self into our water communion bowl. I invite you forward to contribute to our Big Sky water communion.

Silent meditation

End of silent meditation blessing:

"As streams join to become rivers and rivers meet in the great oceans, all that we are, meets with all we are becoming. May we be blessed by the new year, and may we be a blessing."

I invite you to share your reflections on being "united by water"
