

Joining of Waters; Joining Together

Readings: "New Religion" by Bill Holm
"Poem of the One World" by Mary Oliver
"Home are the Sailors" by Samuel Hazo

We pause today, at the beginning of something new, the future that the past made possible. The summer has ended – or has nearly ended. For many of us, it is the beginning of a new school year. We can feel fall in the crisp air of the early morning or see it in the a few leaves that have already turned bright red, yellow, orange.

And it is the beginning of a new church year. And the beginning of my ministry with you all. Whether you've been away from here all summer or regularly attended the smaller services in recent months, welcome. Whether you've been a part of this community for over sixty years, you are a newcomer like me, or your tenure here is somewhere in between, welcome. Welcome back. Welcome home. It is a joy to be together today.

A few minutes ago, we joined together waters that represent the time we spent apart, the time we spent journeying this summer. We are returning from the four directions, whether we journey across continents or across the street. And we are not alone in returning to our spiritual homes today. The water ceremony is happening this very moment at Unitarian Universalist Congregations across the country. People are bringing their waters that represents change and transition, hope and joy, travel and adventure and joining them together. Why do we do this uniquely Unitarian Universalist ritual?

The very first water ceremony happened not so long ago and not so far away – in November 1980 in East Lansing, Michigan. It happened at the Women and Religion Continental Convocation of Unitarian Universalists, a group that formed in 1977. The group challenged sexism in our denomination and in our world and were involved in developing the seven principles of Unitarian Universalism as we know them today. At that 1980 gathering, Carolyn McDade and Lucy Schuck Longview told the women who attended this gathering to bring water from home. They joined their water together as a symbol of strength, community, support, and connection. Merging their water together helped them to know that the work they each were doing in their own community was deeply connected to the work everyone else was doing. No one is alone. We are all in this together.

And the women loved the ritual. They took it home to their churches and it spread from there. Now, almost every Unitarian Universalist congregation does this ritual in the fall. We all need this reminder that we are in this together. We are in this church together. None of us is an independent stream that can flow to the ocean all by itself. We need one another as the stream needs the wind.

That is the what, but why? I think this blending of waters ritual reminds us all in our bodies and our bones of our ancient homes, as creatures and as individuals. When life began on this planet

roughly 3.8 billion years ago, it was in water.¹ And for the next 3 billion years or so, life was only in water.² It took that long for our ancient ancestors to emerge onto land. Beginning in water is the story of all life, but the story is true for each of us individually as well. Each of us began floating, in mostly-water in a womb, listening to the vast lungs of the person that birthed us. We all very briefly had fins and gill slits before we grew arms and legs and lungs. It is as if each of us was preparing for a life under water and then changed our minds. Water is in us; it's most of our bodies. Water is us. Water is our home, so we bring water to our spiritual home.

Through the trials and errors and the small and constant miracles of evolution and chance, we have all come to be here today, come to our spiritual home. In the poem we heard earlier, Samuel Hazo writes, "homes means where we most belong." May this church be the place where we most belong.

May we belong here – in all our unique and diverse identities and in the commonalities that unite us.

May we belong here – and invite others to find themselves at home here too.

May we belong here – in times of tumult and times of peace.

May we belong here – as we learn and worship and lead and follow and serve.

May we belong here – as we look back at the proud history of People's Church – and ahead to the great days to come.

May it be so. May we make it so. Amen.

¹ 'History of Life of Earth.' *BBC*. Retrieved from http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/history_of_the_earth

² 'Life on Land.' *Nature*. December 12, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.nature.com/news/life-on-land-1.12001>