

## Let Justice Roll Down Like Waters: Water Service Homily

Readings: 'Diary of a Woodcutter' (excerpt) by Fuad Rifka  
'A Sailor's Memoir' (excerpt) by Muhammad al-Fayiz  
'The Birthday of the World' by Marge Piercy

E.B. White, the author of beloved books for children like *Charlotte's Web* and *Stuart Little* once said, "Every morning, I awake torn between a desire to save the world and an inclination to savor it. This makes it hard to plan the day. But if we forget to savor the world, what possible reason do we have for saving it? In a way, the savoring must come first."

These words have been echoing in my mind ever since I looked at the calendar and saw that our ingathering service would fall on September 11<sup>th</sup> this year. Here at People's Church, today is a day for savoring the world – we are back together in the commons, we are beginning a program year that will be full of joy and meaning. We have merged our waters together and have brought all of our gifts once again to share with one another. It is a beautiful day to be here with all of you.

And beyond these walls and within our hearts, today is also a day for saving the world. Fifteen years ago, planes crashed into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and a field in Pennsylvania, altering the course of our country's history, altering the course of millions of lives, bringing death and destruction to so many. September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 is a day that many of us vividly remember, we remember where we were when we heard the news, we remember seeing the images played and replayed on our televisions. We remember the fear and anxiety and the illusions of safety shattered.

And many of us gathered today don't remember that day 15 years ago. We weren't alive yet – or were not old enough to have awareness of the wider world. For this younger set, our country has always been at war. The wars that started after September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 –the longest period of war in U.S. history—has spanned their whole memory. They cannot remember a time when we did not have men and women fighting overseas on our behalf. This is their normal.

No matter our age, no matter our memories, today is a day to commit and recommit ourselves to be co-creators of just and lasting peace. We dream of a world where justice rolls down like waters and peace like an ever-flowing stream. We, in our small ways, work to save the world.

E.B. White presents saving and savoring as though they are a choice, as though we must pick one—and then the other. I don't think it's how that works. I believe to live with integrity, to live in right relationship, means to always be half-saving and half-savoring.

I believe the purpose of religious community is to transform ourselves so we can transform the world. This church helps us be better people, so we can make the world better. Our predecessors used different words to describe this, in People's Church Bond of Union from 1892, they wrote: desiring to develop in ourselves and in the world honest, reverent thought, faithfulness to our highest conception of right living, the spirit of love and service to all people, and allegiance towards all the interests of morality and religion, as interpreted by the growing thought and purest lives of humanity.

We do that all still. The transformation that happens here can take many forms – the power and hope that comes through worshipping with one another, the insight and connection that happens in coffee hour and potlucks, the wisdom and meaning-making that happens in religious education, the satisfaction of working together for a common purpose – whether that's the board facing a difficult subject, a committee organizing an event, or volunteers getting classrooms clean before the beginning of the religious education classes next week.

And we know it's not always easy to be in community with one another. Our water is not always smooth, our church life, like other parts of our lives, are not always peaceful. Like all human creations, People's Church is imperfect. We sometimes disappoint one another. We sometimes hurt one another. And that is when we get to practice peace-making, negotiating the differences between us, handling conflict in a way that brings greater health and wholeness. Here we practice right relationship. Here, we catch glimpses of the Beloved Community.

All of this—the joys and the struggles that happen here— transforms us for the better. Makes us better people.

And then as we leave this place, our transformed selves transform the world. As better people, we make the world better. We are kinder in our relationships, we are more generous with our time and money, we partner with others to work for the common good.

So let us be filled up in our being together today and throughout the coming program year.  
Let us be filled with joy and hope, filled with compassion and love,  
And let us pour out peace and justice into our world,  
a world thirsty for what we have to offer.  
Let us work to establish truth righteousness and love in all the world until justice rolls  
down like waters and peace like an ever-flowing stream.  
May it be so. May we make it so. Amen.