

## **Water Ingathering**

Worship Leaders: Allison King and Elise Massicotte

UU Church of Vancouver

September 8, 2024

### **Reflection on the Theme (Alexis Balkowitsch)**

It can be really hard to come up with a reflection on a day like today. And it's not because the topic is controversial or abstract or something that I don't know enough about personally. It's really the opposite. Community, homecoming, water...it's a veritable cornucopia of my favorite feel good topics—And my only directive? Keep it short. I remember the old adage we learned in design school: “you'll do your best work under the most constraints.” This does not feel like one of those times.

So instead of doing what I usually do—which is write with my head—I'd like to take this moment to speak from my heart. And all I'd really like to say is...Thank You.

Thank you for being my Beloved Community. I am admittedly an introvert's introvert. If being the village's esoteric forest hermit was still a viable career option, that would be right up my alley. Suffice to say, it's never been easy for me to feel like I fit anywhere. But ever since I wandered in here eight years ago, looking for a safe place to try singing again, I have felt welcome. Even when times have been tough, either for me personally, for the church, or for the wider world—those times when I know I have a tendency to disengage—I still feel a deep well of spiritual Home-ness, right here.

And as I begin my third and final year as a worship associate, I'm filled with immense gratitude for this community that's not only given me so much, but allowed me to do things I never thought I could. I found my singing voice here, and my speaking voice, and I'm even here in front of y'all without passing out! It's been a journey, and a true gift.

So thank you. Thank you for living your values—not just in the wider world—but right here at home, where a thousand tiny acts of kindness have made such a difference to me, and so many others.

### **Homily (Allison King)**

I'm a water baby. By that, I mean that I am a water sign, if you follow astrology, but most of my growing-up years were spent by the water. I was born in the Bay Area. I grew up within a one hour drive of several beaches which we visited frequently. We took lots of trips to San Francisco, crossing the Bay Bridge into that magical city. When I was 14, my mother and I moved up to the north coast of California, to Mendocino, and I had the enormous privilege of my high school years being someplace where I could spend my

lunch periods sitting on the headlands watching the waves coming in and out. It really was absolutely marvelous.

I was the kid that my mom could never get out of the bathtub, once she could get me into it. My grandparents had a pool, and I was always the first in and the last out. I always wanted to go swimming, even if the temperature outside was only 55 degrees, and it was completely overcast. I loved swimming underwater, making imaginary worlds of mermaids and sea creatures, and pretending to be a dolphin. and practicing the butterfly stroke. One time, my cousin and I were swimming together, practicing the butterfly, and the sight of our bums bouncing up and down out of the water caused the neighbor boy who was spying on us to fall out of his tree laughing. But, I digress.

It's easy, I think, for a kid not to realize just how special water is. I mean, it's there for brushing your teeth, washing up, showering, drinking - it's just there. You don't realize that if you didn't have it, that none of the things you love and use would be there, including yourself. And then some time around the 5th grade, at least it was for me, is when you learn in science class that the surface of the earth is about 70% water. Later, you learn that the human body is about 60% water. Even with my limited 5th grade math skills, I could tell that more than half was A LOT.

I lived through the California drought of 1976 -77. I was in high school, and the town of Mendocino, founded in 1852, had no city water system - everyone had wells. I was lucky to live up in Fort Bragg, 10 miles to the north, which had city water, and we did not suffer as much as some of my friends did. But we all did all of the precautions and remediations - no baths, only showers, and you showered with a big plastic garbage container to collect the extra to water the garden, or to use it to flush the toilet. Don't run the tap while you brush your teeth - like, why would anyone do that, anyway? People had rain barrels. I remember taking gallons of water from the tap at our house to my friends down in Mendocino, just so they could have some extra drinking and cooking water.

Since that time, I've been very conscious of the preciousness of water, and the vital importance of preserving all of nature so that we don't burn our own house down. When I first came to Unitarian Universalism, and experienced my first water communion, I was enchanted. I love the symbolism of our mingled waters, from the various places that we've been this summer, coming together to make one new body of water.

The Water Communion was started in 1980 by Carolyn McDade, composer of Spirit of Life, and Lucille Schuck Longview. They were asked to create a worship service for the Women and Religion Continental Convocation of Unitarian Universalists, so it's fitting that we are doing this today while our minister and administrator are attending the International Convocation of Unitarian Universalist Women.

As they shaped that service, McDade and Longview wanted to create a new ritual "that spoke to our connectedness to one another, to the totality of life, and to our place on this planet." They included a new, inclusive symbol of women's spirituality: water.

They wrote,

“Water is more than simply a metaphor. It is elemental and primary, calling forth feelings of awe and reverence. Acknowledging that the ocean is considered by many to be the place from which all life on our planet came—it is the womb of life—and that amniotic waters surround each of us prenatally, we now realize that [this worship service] was for us a new story of creation... We choose water as our symbol of our empowerment.

Water is a miracle. Think about being by a stream as it flows by - it's the same stream that it's always been, in this same place, but it is literally different every moment as the water flows, having come from snow-melt and precipitation, that came from condensation, that was gathered from evaporation, that was gathered from lakes, rivers, and streams....

The water remembers. The same water that watered your lawn may one day appear as a snowflake on a mountain in Switzerland. The same water from a sprinkler in Australia may appear in your next pint at the pub. The water in you may become the water in someone else some day.

We are water. Water doesn't care who you are, where you come from, who you love, who you vote for, or whether or not you think pineapple belongs on pizza. We are water. It nurtures and sustains us. Should we not work to do the same for the water?

Like I said, I'm a water baby, and I've been sailing all my life now. I invite you to rise in body or in spirit as we sing our closing hymn, #1064, Blue Boat Home.