

“Shall Live in Peace and Unafraid”

A reflection for water communion offered by Reverend Carolyn Patierno
September 11, 2016

Shall live in peace and unafraid. (a lyric from “Vine & Fig Tree”)

Unitarian Universalists throughout the country are gathering this morning to join water with water. Here in Unity Hall music and beauty hold the hope of the newcomer and the balm of the familiar for those who long ago named this place as home.

Water is at the center of this service that this year falls on an infamous date in our country's history. Grown-ups remember minute details of that day 15 years ago. The crisp, blue, cloudless, late summer sky

Where you were when?
Who you were with?

Liz Binger and I had just had breakfast together, our first as minister and Board president. My memory begins with the hope and happiness that was at the root of the day's start.

And then

And then the date “September 11” became a symbol of our collective heartbreak, never again to be merely a date representing a day in a month, late in the summer season.

That night we gathered as a congregation. The morning's hope and happiness had evaporated but the water we had gathered for the water communion stood still. It remained on the chancel table – a reminder of our strength.

Fifteen years since, our strength is as needed now as it was when we tried to figure out a way forward. We who have the audacity to imagine all people living in peace and unafraid must be ever vigilant and strong.

Imagine: all people living in peace and unafraid.

Anyone who grows up at the ocean – for me that was going “down the shore” – anyone who grows up at the ocean, is taught how to swim in the ocean. Is taught to respect its power. You are taught to face the waves.

Face the waves.

We must do the same: face the waves. Never can we turn our backs from the things that threaten to swallow us up: fear, hate, greed, apathy. We must face the waves. In fact, we must dive underneath to see what's there and then come up again for air ... to breathe ... to finally rest upon the waters.

We gather water from near and far that comes to us from one sky. We gather as a religious community that professes the hard work of dialogue and learning and action amidst the din of voices that forge greater division among people that would be one.

We gather water this morning while Native Americans at the Standing Rock reservation in North Dakota are peacefully resisting those who would decimate sacred sites and potentially, water. Water: the sacred source of life.

So I will conclude with wisdom from Luther Standing Bear, a Lakota chief and one of the first Native Americans who wrote about life of his people in the late 19th and early 20th century. The Chief said:

From Wakan Tanka, the Great Spirit, there came a great unifying life force that flowed in and through all things - the flowers of the plains, blowing winds, rocks, trees, birds, animals - and was the same force that had been breathed into the first man. Thus all things were kindred, and were brought together by the same Great Mystery.

Kinship with all creatures of the earth, sky, and water was a real and active principle.

This ritual is a reminder of the commitments that bind us together and with others who also endeavor to face suffering, who face life with integrity, courage, and hope so that all people may live in peace and unafraid.

Amen.