

Water Communion '26

On water communion Sunday, my homily has most often focused on the aspects of water that can metaphorically be applied to community. This year, I was drawn to take a different approach. I want to reflect less on the water and more on communion.

What is communion, anyway? Why do we call some of our most moving ceremonies communions? As a starting point, we can always do the etymological tango. The word itself comes from the Latin *communio*, which means "fellowship, mutual participation, a sharing." That word breaks down to *Comm* which means "with" and *unionem* which mean "oneness or unity." Remember that as we proceed.

We also can say that communions come in many forms; with ourselves being a chief example. By way of further evidence of the breadth of the practice, and also a method that may shine light on what communion is about, I'd like to lift up Stephen Blackmer, founder of church of the woods. When he left the Episcopal Priesthood, Blackmer acquired a parcel of land that had been logged into near desertification. It had been ravaged. These days his whole religious practice is to wander that land and with utmost sincerity, grief, and appreciation say to that ecorange, "You're so beautiful. I love you." That is his communion; his being with unity.

Obviously, concept and reality of communion is far more broad than the Christian practice of the eucharist most associated with it. That said, just for a moment, let's indulge our Christian lineage. For there is something here that gets to the heart of the matter and doubles down on understanding that communion is a unity with unity.

Firstly, let's remember the first communion was really a passover seder. It was a meal. And then well before it was ritualistically reduced to wafer and wine, communion - in the very early church - it remained a full meal. It was their central act of worship. A meal to become one. There is something very beautiful about that. Their community was a reflection of the capital U unity.

Recall too that the magic words, the invocation, invitation, observation, and articulation of that unity were something like, "This is my body. This is my blood."

Joshua did not turn himself into bread. There was no transubstantiation. Rather, Joshua was observing an ontological truth. I am bread. I am sustenance. Just like, "I am of you, you are of me." We are of the bread we eat and it is of us. As it was of him. The first communion was recognition, remembrance, and demonstration of the interdependent web of existence of which we are all participants.

Taken together, the communion meal and, "This is my body," comprise a creation story much like our Bone Story today. **Communion is the re-creation of community, but where community is**

not only those in the room, but the bread and the wheat and the soil and the forests, animals, air, and water. Interdependent community in a constant state of re-creation. Communion is unceasing. Communion reminds us that we are all one and in a constant state of creation. Every moment is a creation story. Every moment is communion.

And so communion as a ritual is a pantomime of what is, a reminder. It is a theatrical expression and embodiment of something that is always ongoing. Theater does not mean fake. You well know that theater, done well, can break us open and put us in touch with the sublime. So too a good ritual.

Our communion rituals are rooted in the four elements. We use those elements to find fellowship and mutual participation with... fill in the blank according to your vocabulary... with god, with the interdependent web, with the tao, the universe...

Communion is a mutual participation with unity. It is the invitation, invocation, and articulation - the experience - of fellowship with oneness, with each other and all the expressions of the interdependent web of being and infinite avatars of god.

No pressure. That's what we're doing this morning. Pretty neat.

Ceremony Prep

In a moment I will invite you to pour your water - water that represents the character you bring to this community, the articulation of the fundamental unity that is you - into the basin while expressing in words to the congregation what that character might be. Maybe it is the quality of the experience around getting the water. We don't need to know its geographic origin. As a symbol of community making, we are keenly interested in the character we bring.

This year I would invite you to add a phrase after you name your contributing character. I would invite you to practice as Stephen Blackmer does and say, "You're so beautiful. I love you." I am curious what effect this addendum might have. "You're so beautiful. I love you."

I will invite you up in sections. Please come down the sides and return up the middle. Take turns declaring the water's character. And then the phrase. For instance, "Levity. You're so beautiful. I love you." And then exit up the middle. It would be really neat if your declarations followed right after each other, creating a cascade of words, a rain of character and love for us to meditate on as we bear witness to the emerging soul of this community.

(Depending on time:)

We Unitarian Universalists are water-kind. We are water people.

We are the universal solvent of religion:

*distilling it to it's elemental unity,
assimilating and transporting that essence
as a stream coursing into our lives and further;
into the cycles of the world.*

*We are the refreshing oxbow flow of the quest and question.
We are water people.
We are cloudy or clear, turbulent or calm,
in great waves or tranquil currents
conveying life to life.*

*We are people of the water.
We are fluid, taking the shape of our container:
our building, our bodies, our community, our history and hope, our language.*

*We take the shape of our covenant.
Yet as we fill our container, we will,
over time, wear it away and spill ourselves into the next,
the next asking.
Our waters ever mingling, our water ever shared,
slipping finally out to that broad sea:
forever cycling, forever living, the ever present
only now.*

What character, what word will you share with us to make us more whole? I will begin by adding water from our waters gathered last year, thus connecting our past to our future. Finding our way. You're so beautiful. I love you.

CEREMONY

Blessing of the Waters

And here is a new thing. This is water re-made, a new gathering, a congregation reinvigorated; this mixing of our perspectives and experiences and dysfunctions and inspirations; our authenticity welcomed, our integrity redoubled, our strength reinforced.

May this mingling water wear away our rough edges. May we hear its lesson of flexibility, receptivity, and flow. May it grant us the power to transform ourselves and the culture in which we move.

May we fashion for it a sturdy and capable course. May our bodies be sound. May our congregation be sound, and flowing, and flexible, and powerful. May our community shape us as

it shapes the world. May our water's meaning flow through us as we use it each Sunday to declare our hope and value and method; our faith.