



UNIVERSALIST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF HAVERHILL

“There is a Fountain,”
a reflection given by the Rev. Frank Clarkson
on September 9, 2012

When we dedicate or baptize a child here, I take some water from this bottle which is water from you, from our annual water communion, water from the current year and water from years past, back to 1997, and pour it into this bowl. When it's time, I put it on the forehead of the person being blessed, and say their name, and say, “Know that you are beloved on this earth.”

Don't we all need to be reminded of that? Know that you are beloved on this earth.

When I was in seminary, at the back of our chapel there was a small bowl, attached to the wall, just inside the door, with water in it. When you walked in, you could dip your fingers in that bowl, and touch that water to your forehead, as a blessing as you entered that sacred space. I got in the habit of doing this, and it did feel like a blessing. Feeling that cool, moist touch helped put me in a place where I was more open to the blessing of worship there.

One day, one of my Episcopal friends, and most of my friends there were Episcopal, since it was an Episcopal seminary, saw me touch that water to my forehead. He did a double-take. “But you're a UU,” he said. “I still need the blessing,” I replied.

Water is a powerful symbol. All life depends on it--we can go without food for a lot longer than we can survive without water. If you have ever been in hot, dry country, you come to a new appreciation of how precious water is. This was especially true this summer, when so much of our country was suffering from drought and had dried up. When I came back from being out west, I was struck by how moist New England is! And sometimes people have too much water, as people along the Gulf Coast, suffering from hurricanes this time of year can tell you--too much water can bring suffering.

On this first Sunday of the new church year, we invite you to bring water as a symbol of the places and experiences you have where you are in touch with what is life-giving and holy. It may be water from the tap in your home, or from a river or lake or ocean that is special to you. When you bring it and share it, in effect you are saying, “I am bringing to this place, to this community, my experiences of what is sacred and true and good and life-giving.” You are blessing us with the water that you bring, and of course, with your self--your experiences, your wisdom, you.

This year, while you share your water, Claudia will softly play some music, and at the end, the choir will sing. We ask you to simply give the name of where the water comes from. And if you

didn't bring water, pour some from the pitcher and just say where it would have come from. Our intent is to make this sharing itself feel like sacred time--hopefully it will help you to recall those places you felt in the presence of living waters and bountiful blessing.

Because we all need blessing. Each of us get dry and parched, each of us gets tired and frustrated, lonely and afraid. We come together to be in the presence of one another, and the blessing that community offers. And we come together to open ourselves to the presence of that which is More--that presence some of us call God or Spirit.

It's easy to get discouraged and dried out. That's why I love the poem¹ Sandra read a few minutes ago:

Don't say, don't say there is no water
to solace the dryness at our hearts.
I have seen the fountain springing out of the rock wall
and you drinking there.

We need to be reminded of this. It's why I love and need the church--as a place to come and be refreshed and renewed--watered, so we can bloom and grow.

The Grateful Dead sang a song about this, called "Ripple." (Some of you will remember the tune--da da-da da da...) One verse is a good description of church and the kind of community we try to have here:

Reach out your hand if your cup be empty,
If your cup is full may it be again,
Let it be known there is a fountain,
That was not made by the hands of men.

Let it be known, there is a fountain, that we didn't make or do anything to earn. It's freely given, this water, this blessing, available if we will wait and watch, if we will ask for it, if we will be open to life, in all its fullness--the joy and the sorrow, the pain and the blessings.

Don't say, don't say there is no water.
That fountain is there...
it is still there and always there
with its quiet song and strange power
to spring in us,
up and out through the rock.

Amen.

¹ "The Fountain," by Denise Levertov, available online at http://www.panhala.net/Archive/The_Fountain.html