

Rain falls and fills the gutters,  
Freshens the earth, gurgles away  
Down the street  
Fills the rivers to rise and flood,  
Slips and skips and slides to the sea, to ebb and flow.  
And so we come together  
For a lifetime of weeks or a few years,  
A month or  
Only today –  
Like water from a thousand sources, we join together  
On this Sunday, in this place,  
Under the same sun and rain, the same trees and roof.  
Reflecting the light and taking it into ourselves,  
Like water,  
Like water,  
Like water.

Namaste – the sacred in me welcomes the sacred in you. Today we gather in community to celebrate. We have and will again welcome those who are new to this shared space, and those who come again and again, seeking fellowship and friendship and inquiry and *soul*. We reunite like water drops that have been long separated.

Maybe your drop traveled far this summer, in a plane or car, over the sky or on the ground. Maybe your drop stayed here, in a swimming pool filled with boisterous, noisy kids. Maybe your drop was in the dog's water bowl, or a fast-evaporating puddle. Maybe you had a rough summer and it felt like your drop was one of the ones in the toilet bowl. But hey, toilet water is IMPORTANT. Even at your lowest ebb, you are important, too, and worth celebrating.

Thank you for choosing to share your Sunday morning with us. It's a special Sunday for me, taking what is the craziest, most wonderful leap of faith of my entire life. It's a special Sunday because we got to welcome new members, a ritual that speaks to our hope for the future and our shared work in this community. It's a special Sunday because it's Water Communion, one of the few rituals we intentionally create and re-create every year with one another. More on that later.

Twice today we've read the Affirmation together. We read it every week, but we rarely talk about what it means. It's habit, and habits aren't necessarily bad – they are comforting and stabilizing – but I think once in a while we should revisit why we say an Affirmation, and more importantly for us, why we say THIS Affirmation.

We start every week by saying "Love is the doctrine of this Fellowship." And love is a place, a state of being, where we're all at our most vulnerable. Hopefully we are digging into deep matters each week, which makes us even more vulnerable. And

it's good to remind myself sometimes that not only might I feel vulnerable, my neighbor may, too.

And it's when we're at our most vulnerable that we are most likely to do crazy things. Sometimes it's good crazy, where we take wild leaps of faith or make life-affirming changes or reach out to help others in ways we'd never have dreamed of doing if we weren't at our most tender. Sometimes it's bad crazy, where we are afraid and hurting and we spin in itchy, ouchy circles, throwing off droplets of random, poisonous venom in an effort to protect ourselves, because the vulnerability is just too much.

When we speak of those painful vulnerabilities, we often use medical metaphors. We speak of broken hearts and healing, emotional band-aids and having a sore spot, a tenderness around our vulnerability. We speak of being wounded.

When you were a child, and you had a scraped knee, what's the first thing your caregiver did, after, of course, kissing away the ouchie? He washed the scraped knee. She stuck it under running water. From scraped knees up to more serious wounds, water is the first step to cleansing, to see what's really happened under all the ick and gunk, to healing.

When it comes to our emotional wounds, water fills another metaphorical well from which we draw: We wade in the water, we go down to the river to pray, we gather at the river, we wash away the pain. In religious terms, water is often equated with holiness. From Hindus gathering at the Ganges to Baptists on the river Jordan, we humans seem to see water as powerful.

Water, like love, can be destructive. Water, like love, can be generative. Water, like love, can get into the cracks and the corners where we thought we were dry. Like love, water can work slowly, wearing down the sharp, cutting, painful corners of our lives into smoothness and ease. It can slosh into every corner of our being, filling us up like a river in flood, or drain away and leave us dry, aching, and empty. But like water, we can't live without love.

If love really is the doctrine of this Fellowship, then we should beware. We should be bold and sometimes crazy, but we should also be careful. Because water and love are powerful forces, forces to be reckoned with. In this place, with love as our doctrine, we make ourselves tender and vulnerable, not just to our past, but to our present – to one another most of all.

With the water we bring together together this morning, we nurture our garden and help it grow. With the love we weave each week, we hope to go out into the garden of our community and help it to grow as well, into a more just and loving world. But gently, gently – both in our garden and in our community. Go gently with others, and go gently with yourself. Don't waste your gifts carelessly.

If you brought water this morning, I invite you to bring it forward now, forming a line on this side of the sanctuary, and add it to the water already here. If you didn't bring water, we have communal water to share. If your water represents a place you wish to recognize, feel free to share one or two words as you pour.

## WATER COMMUNION

"Like the Water," by Wendell Berry.

Like the water  
of a deep stream,  
love is always too much.  
We did not make it.  
Though we drink till we burst,  
we cannot have it all,  
or want it all.  
In its abundance  
it survives our thirst.

In the evening we come down to the shore  
to drink our fill,  
and sleep,  
while it flows  
through the regions of the dark.  
It does not hold us,  
except we keep returning to its rich waters  
thirsty.

We enter,  
willing to die,  
into the commonwealth of its joy.

I invite you to go out into the dry, thirsty world and be vulnerable. I invite you to go out into the bright, terrible, beautiful world and be loving. I invite you to come back here, seeking to be vulnerable and loving again, and seeking also to refill the well of your best, most loving self. And I will do that work beside you.

Namaste. The sacred in me honors the sacred in you.