Be One in One Another:
Water Communion & Ingathering Sunday
UU Fellowship of Santa Cruz County
September 7, 2025

Selected worship texts

Chalice Lighting

Welcome to our water communion Sunday,
this annual ritual to celebrate the start of a new congregational year,
to regather ourselves as a community,
grounded in the ancient cycles of this planet
and the love in our own hearts.

Later in our service, we'll invite everyone to participate in the water communion by pouring water into a common bowl,
or for our Zoom congregation, pouring water into a vessel
to be released into the watershed wherever you are.
Honoring our connection to all that is
through the waters that have been flowing and ebbing
and flowing again
since Earth was young.

For now, let us light our chalice
to welcome in the ancient Spirit-partner
and joyful opposite of the waters: **fire.**
Welcome, fire! Burn bright here as you do in the Earth's deep core
and in the white-hot center of the Sun itself.

Story for All Ages "Wonderache," by John Roedel

I had been carrying hope
in my pocket like it was
polished gemstone for years

whenever trouble came
I'd squeeze hope tightly
in my shaking hand

and I could feel
it bump against my
palm like a newborn
heartbeat

that's how
I knew that
I was safe

recently though,
I somehow lost my hope

I have no idea if I put it down
somewhere or if it slipped out
while I was fumbling for my keys

without being able
to hold onto hope
I soon became lost myself

after a while of wandering
in the wild on my own
I bumped into hope
~ who looked so different

hope was no longer a
little gemstone that could
fit in my pants pocket

hope was a now a wide stream

cutting through the woods

“I thought I lost you!” I admonished

the river grabbed a couple of
rainbow trout and used them
to smile at me

“lost me?” The water babbled. “That’s impossible!”

“Well, one minute I was holding onto you and the next you were gone.”

“I needed to change forms,” Hope replied.

“Why?” I asked.

“Because you’ve been carrying me for so long that I decided we should try something different.”

“What’s that?”

“I thought I would take a turn carrying you for a bit.”

the river rose
up around me
and pulled me gently onto
my back

I was floating

I didn’t realize how exhausted I was
until the river held me
and hope carried me
and hope carried me

and hope carried me

~now whenever trouble comes
I just spread my arms open
and let hope wrap me up in
her slow water

and I can still feel it
pulse against me like a
newborn heartbeat

that's how
I know that
I'm safe again

I don't know where
we are going

hope and I
still appear to
be so lost

but at least we
are together

maybe we will stay out here
without a map for a while longer

funny enough, I'm in no rush
to get to our destination
because it has been so long
since I've felt held by anything

and I now think I could really
start to get used to it

Reading "Complaint of El Rio Grande," by Richard Blanco

Six years ago, at the Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly, the Cuban-American poet Richard Blanco was invited to speak. At that event, he read the poem you're about to hear.

For today, we have edited it very slightly.
Blanco uses several racial epithets in the poem
to make a point about prejudice.
We'll hear the poem without them today,
since it did not feel right to speak those words in this sacred space.
This is Richard Blanco's "Complaint of El Rio Grande,"
read today by Pratibha Queen:

I was meant for all things to meet:
to make the clouds pause in the mirror
of my waters, to be home to fallen rain
that finds its way to me, to turn eons
of loveless rock into lovesick pebbles
and carry them as humble gifts back
to the sea which brings life back to me.

I felt the sun flare, praised each star
flocked about the moon long before
you did. I've breathed air you'll never
breathe, listened to songbirds before
you could speak their names, before
you dug your oars in me, before you
created the gods that created you.

Then countries—your invention—maps
jigsawing the world into colored shapes
caged in bold lines to say: you're here,
not there, you're this, not that, to say:
yellow isn't red, red isn't black, black is

not white, to say: *mine*, not *ours*, to say
war, and believe life's worth is relative.

You named me big river, drew me—blue,
thick to divide…. You split me
in two—half of me *us*, the rest *them*. But
I wasn't meant to drown children, hear
mothers' cries, never meant to be your
geography: a line, a border, a murderer.

I was meant for all things to meet:
the mirrored clouds and sun's tingle,
birdsongs and the quiet moon, the wind
and its dust, the rush of mountain rain—
and us. Blood that runs in you is water
flowing in me, both life, the truth we
know we know: be one in one another.

Water Communion/Blessing of the Waters

Forty-five years ago, in 1980, two Unitarian Universalist women
created a new ritual that, in their words,
"spoke to our connectedness to one another,
to the totality of life, and to our place on this planet."[1]
One was Carolyn McDade, the creator of our beautiful hymn "Spirit of Life." The other was Lucile Shuck Longview, the primary author
of an enormously impactful denominational statement
on women and religion.

In their time, they created this ritual, which would come to be known throughout Unitarian Universalism as the Water Communion,
to honor and reinforce the shift in our faith
away from patriarchy to an expansive welcome

[1] https://www.uua.org/worship/holidays/water-communion/original-water-ritual

of the full experience of women,
who had for so long been relegated to a lesser place
even in our free religious movement.

At the service where this water ritual was performed for the first time,
these words were spoken:
We must question every box, every definition,
every assignment from an authority outside our own beings
so that we can create and re-create for ourselves
the rituals and symbols that give meaning to us.
So we come together to question.
To hear.
To share.
To speak.
To inspire.
And to celebrate through new rituals,
knowing that our energy and our love are transforming.
Celebrating now our connectedness,
we choose water as our symbol of our empowerment.[2]

They invited everyone assembled
to gather around a common bowl,
a sign of the equality and dignity of all people.
And participants brought forward water from across the continent,
including from the Atlantic and Pacific oceans,
from the rain that had fallen in Maryland,
from the Assiniboine *[Uh-SIN-uh-boyn]* River in Winnipeg, Canada,
and from the Rio Grande.

Today, 45 years after that first water communion,
we gather to celebrate our own.
So much has changed since then.
But are we not still in need

[2] https://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/featured-new/water-rituals-and-ingatherings-revitalized/

of questioning every authority outside ourselves
that dares to treat anyone as unworthy of love,
of safety, of protection and dignity?
Are we not still in need of reclaiming our deep strength in these times?

So today, let us observe our own Water Communion
as a ritual of hope and liberation.

In a few moments,
those of us here in the sanctuary
will be invited to pour a bit of water into a common bowl.
This bowl will also contain water
from water communions in years past,
just as this community extends from the past into the future.
Some of us have brought water from someplace special to us.
But if you didn't, don't worry!
We have a full pitcher of water for you to use.
Everyone is welcome.

And if you're here online, *you* are a part of the Water Communion too.
For you, the invitation will be to take your bit of water
and pour it into a bowl wherever you are right now,
knowing that many others are doing the same thing
in many different places.

This year, we'll invite everyone to pour your water in silence
as our choir sings.
And then, after the service,
you're invited to share your stories
of where your water came from and what it means to you.

We begin by pouring water from water communions past
into the common bowl.

Now, with reverence, I invite you to join in the Water Communion.

If you are online,
pour your water into your own bowl whenever feels right.
And if you're here in the sanctuary, the ushers will go row by row
and invite you to come forward when it's your turn.
May the waters be brought forth.

When everyone has come forward:

If you are online, after the service,
I invite you to go outside, if you can,
and pour your water on the ground.
Or you can simply pour it into the sink, mindfully,
knowing that all waters will meet eventually
in the watersheds and in the oceans,
cycling and mixing again and again
on this Earth we share.

Now we pause to let these gifts of water flow out
as a blessing to all who need it.

We bring forth three cups to receive this blessing:
First, for the people of Gaza who need food and water *now*,
and for everyone in Israel who yearns for real peace.

Second, for the immigrant communities and everyone who is being terrorized by our government. May justice flow down like a mighty stream.

Third, for all people and all beings everywhere who are suffering, and for our earth which urgently deserves our care.

(Choir sings By the Waters of Babylon)

Our sorrow is welcome in this moment of our common life.
Our tears are welcome.

And yet, so is our joy.
So is our strength,
so is our dancing,
so is our readiness to rise again and again to meet this moment.

Extinguishing the Chalice/Closing Blessing

Folks in the sanctuary, please remain standing as you're able.
In just a moment, I'll offer a closing blessing,
then Thomas will extinguish our chalice until we light our flame again,
and then Carol will lead us in singing our Doxology.
After that, you're welcome to stay for hospitality!
I'll be around to chat, and I'm hoping to connect with folks on Zoom via a laptop we'll set up outside.

And now, we extinguish the chalice with this blessing, adapted from Lisa Garcia-Sampson:

In these wild, historic, and uncertain times, we [have gathered]
to remember who we are,
who we belong to,
and what we are called to do.

[Though] we [extinguish] this chalice, [let] the spirit of the great turning [burn bright in our hearts]:
the movement for justice alive in this nation today.

May we feel it in our bones, …
may we sense it calling our name.
[May we rise to meet its call.]

(Adapted from https://www.uua.org/worship/words/chalice-lighting/great-turning)

May it be so. Go in peace. Blessed be and amen.