

RETURNING TO THE SOURCE
INGATHERING WATER CEREMONY
The Rev. Julie Stoneberg
Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough
September 11, 2016

OPENING RESPONSIVE READING *We Bid You Welcome* #442

This morning falls on the 15th anniversary of 9-11, a day which changed the western world, and a day which unfortunately closed many hearts to 'the other', particularly to those who happen to practice Islam or to be of middle-eastern descent.

This is a congregation that aspires to be a community of welcome. And on this anniversary, let us speak words of welcome to one another.

We bid you welcome, who come with weary spirit seeking rest.

Who come with troubles that are too much for you, who come hurt and afraid.

We bid you welcome, who come with hope in your heart.

Who come with anticipation in your step, who come proud and joyous.

We bid you welcome, who are seekers of a new faith.

Who come to probe and explore, who come to learn.

We bid you welcome, who enter this hall as a homecoming,

Who have found here room for your spirit, who find in this people a family.

Whoever you are, whatever you are, wherever you are on your journey,

(all) We bid you welcome.

RETURNING TO THE SOURCE (*September's Theme: Return*)

Our theme for the month of September is being "a community of return." It's an apt theme for this time when we return to our regular schedule...when we return to our Sunday morning rituals and routines...when we return to this place where we see old friends and greet new ones.

But this morning I invite you to consider what it means, in your life, to return to the places, or the people, or the spirit, or the attitude, or the source, where you are fed and renewed.

One of my mum's favourite hymns was *Fill My Cup, Lord*. "Come and quench this thirsting in my soul. Fill me till I want no more..." While its specific theology is not mine, I still find myself singing it often. It reminds me to return to my source.

In addition, an image from the Christian testament that really sticks with me is that of the woman at the well...an outsider...alone...wanting...and how she enters into a conversation with a passerby about the presence of life-giving, life-sustaining waters. Suffice it to say that

she had her doubts about its existence. What about you? Is it possible something exists that would truly quench our thirst?

We come here seeking. Because just as bodies can die from a lack of water, spirits can shrivel up from a lack of sustenance and renewal and connection.

Actually, I love the image of ANY well... out in a desert, among rocks; an oasis; an old country pump; a quiet, secluded spring; a healing place where there is fresh cool water that springs up from the center of the earth...

I love the anticipation of pumping a well, or dropping down a bucket, and wondering what will appear...and then comes something so surprising and elemental...so cold, so fresh...out of the darkness, out of existence itself.

This morning, you are invited to return to that source, whatever it is for you, where you find renewal, where you find nourishment, where you find life-giving waters.

Perhaps you find some of that renewal in singing, in singing joyfully and playfully, as we're about to do.

STORY FOR ALL AGES

Nobiah's Well

~ Donna Guthrie

(An African tale about a young boy who gives away his family's only water to help some animals who are thirsty. In turn, they help him to dig a well that must be as deep as your heart and as wide as your thirst.)

WATER CEREMONY/BLESSING THE WATER

Into this bowl we have poured water, and dropped pebbles, that represent all of us — all our shared dreams, hopes, and values, and our different journeys and backgrounds.

To quote Robert Frost, 'here are both our waters AND our watering place . You have brought waters to this place where you, and many others, will find nourishment and refreshment...this place 'where love and need are one.'

Blessed be the water of this community.

AS DEEP AS YOUR HEART, AS WIDE AS YOUR THIRST

Here are your waters and your watering place.

You must dig, said that little ant bear, as deep as your heart and as wide as your thirst. You must dig, and persevere, and keep returning, until you reach that place where you find water and are filled.

And if we're so blessed, we find others willing to dig alongside us when we hunger and thirst. And so that others might be similarly blessed, we aspire to help others find their own deep well. Here, in community, we seek, and dig, and drink...together.

Earlier, when I invited you to return to that place where you are fed and renewed, what did you imagine? Where did you go?

I trust and pray that at least some of you had to 'go' nowhere...that where you are now is that place, or at least one of those places, for you.

May we be both the water and the watering place...and bring who we are so that others might drink...and come with our thirst, with our tongues hot and dry...that we may be filled.

CLOSING WORDS

Unison Benediction

~ *May Sarton*

Return to the most human,
nothing less will nourish the torn spirit,
the bewildered heart,
the angry mind:
and from the ultimate duress,
pierced with the breath of anguish,
speak of love.

Return, return to the deep sources,
nothing less will teach the stiff hands a new way to serve,
to carve into our lives the forms of tenderness
and still that ancient necessary pain preserve.

Return to the most human,
nothing less will teach the angry spirit,
the bewildered heart;
the torn mind,
to accept the whole of its duress,
and pierced with anguish...
at last, to act for love.

Go out, returning again and again to your source, and returning again here very soon!
Amen.