

LET THE WATER HOLD YOU
MULTIGENERATIONAL WATER INGATHERING
THE UNITARIAN FELLOWSHIP OF PETERBOROUGH
REV. JULIE STONEBERG
SEPTEMBER 8, 2019

OPENING WORDS *Even This is Enough* ~ Vanessa Southern¹

So much undone.
So much to do.
So much to heal
in us and the world.
So much to acquire:
a meal
a healthy body –
a fit one –
a lover
a job
a better job
proof we have and are enough
just around the corner of now.

And up against it the reality of all that falls short and the limits of today.
We honor the limits:
If your body won't do what it used to, for right now let it be enough.
If your mind won't stop racing or can't think of the word, let it be enough.
If you are here utterly alone and in despair, be all that here with us.
If today you cannot sing because your throat hurts or you don't have the heart
for music, be silent.
When the offering plate goes around if you don't have money to give or the heart
to give, let it pass.

The world won't stop spinning on her axis if you don't rise to all occasions today.
Love won't cease to flow in your direction,
your heart won't stop beating,
all hope won't be lost.

You are part of the plan for this world's salvation,
of that I have no doubt.

The world needs its oceans of people striving to be good
to carry us to the shores of hope and wash fear from the beach heads,
and cleanse all wounds so they can heal.

But oceans are big and I am sure there are parts that don't feel up to the task of
the whole some days.

¹ <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/prayer/even-enough>

Rest, if you must, then, like the swimmer lying on her back who floats,
or the hawk carried on cushions of air.
Rest in pews made to hold weary lives in space carved out for the doing of
nothing much
but being.

Perhaps then you will feel in your bones,
in your weary heart,
the aching, healing sense that
this is enough—
even this.

That we are enough.
You are enough.
Enough.

For these and all the meditations of our hearts unspoken in this hour, I say,
“Amen.”

DRE COVENANTING

To make covenants is at the heart of this faith. It’s about promises...to ourselves, to each other, to whatever we identify as greater than ourselves. And today, as we begin a new adventure in the life of our Religious Exploration programming, with a new Director, Ben Robins, we’re attending to our covenant with him and with our children.

So, Ben, would you join me here? And kids, if you’re willing, it would be great if you could come up front to take part in the ceremony, and that also means you’ll be in just the right place for the story in a few minutes.

Julie to Ben: Do you covenant to direct the Religious Exploration program with integrity, respect, creativity, inclusion, sensitivity, and commitment to our principles and vision?

If so, please say "I do."

And do you covenant to bring your energy, your humour, your love of ideas, your love of theatre, music and dance, your love of the outdoors, your love of community and shared living?

If so, please say "I do."

Julie to kids: For all the children and youth present, do you welcome Ben as the Director of Religious Exploration, and promise to take part joyfully in RE, bringing your spirit, your creativity, your wonder, your questions, your hopes and fears, your laughter and tears? If so, please say "We do."

Are there any among you who would you like to say something that you hope for this year in RE? Come on up to the mic...

Julie to congregation: For the adults present: Do you affirm Ben Robins as the Director of Religious Exploration of our Fellowship, and pledge to journey with him in nurturing our children into lives centred on love, justice, respect, inclusion, exploration, and all the other good things? If so, please say "We do."

And do you covenant to connect with Ben, and perhaps tell him your story, your

interests, your quirks (if you have any), and pledge to be part of the multi-generational relationships that are vital to everyone's spiritual development? If so, please say "We do."

Ben: Thank you for entrusting me with this position.

Our purpose statement says that "Grounded in love, we strive to be a welcoming community that embraces life with wonder and inquiry. We foster personal transformation and act for a just and sustainable world."

I will help us to welcome our children and youth on this amazing journey.

I wish to recognize Gloria, our RE Facilitator... and the many people who have nurtured RE over the years as directors, teachers, facilitators, guests, committee members, cooks and cleaners, over-night supervisors, last-minute fill-ins. If you wish to be recognized for your leadership or participation in RE, please stand up or give a wave. Thank you.

STORY FOR ALL *Sergio Makes a Splash* ~ Edel Rodriguez

(In this story, a penguin who can't swim and is afraid of the water, is encouraged to give it a try.)

LET THE WATER HOLD YOU

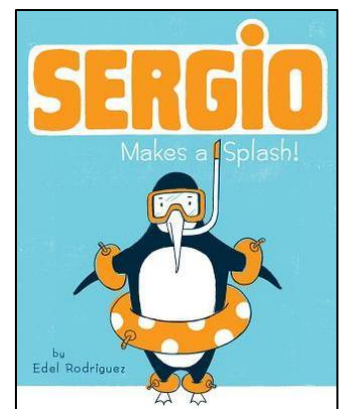
Don't you love this picture of Sergio...all geared up in order to survive a jump into the ocean? There is nothing as sweet as a young'un in a colourful life preserver... not yet able to swim, perhaps unaware that they are in a potentially dangerous situation, but trusting that they will be held up.

In my childhood, we regularly took summer trips to Lake Michigan where my cousins had a lake place. There's a story told about my family losing sight of me. I was maybe three, swathed in blow up ring, out on that big lake, and I apparently floated away. I actually have a dim recollection of watching the people on the beach fading into the distance, but I felt no fear. I was simply floating...and loving it...until I heard my father frantically calling my name, and running into the water to save me.

And nearly every summer since, my summer has included a family reunion at some lake. We've insisted on a lake location because one thing we share is a love of water. Our days are spent swimming and splashing, floating and paddling, and kayaking and fishing, and now, as we age, each day seems to also include long pontoon rides.

But floating is the ultimate thing. It's gotten rather ridiculous. One of my sisters insists on having some huge inflatable fun-island that's about as big as my house, one niece brings a blow-up swan which is as big as my garage, and everyone else has their own personal favourite 'floaty'. We have to be sure that someone brings an air compressor so that we have some hope of blowing up what can seem like hundreds of floatation devices.

There are always little ones; my siblings' kids now have kids, and I simply adore seeing them out on the lake with their swim rings, their water wings, and their goggles,



paddling away fearlessly (well, most of them. We do have one little Sergio in the family!)

So with these images in mind, I want to talk about the water. Philip Booth wrote a poem called *First Lesson* in which he encourages his daughter to lie back...to trust that the sea of life will hold her. His words will be our closing words, but for now, I simply want to echo him in encouraging this in you. Lie back. Look up and become one with the sky and the stars and all that is. Trust life and our interconnection with all that is.

But I also want to talk about life preservers. Swim rings. Floation devices. As adults, I believe that we have many metaphorical 'swim aids'...something or someone that help us out when the waters of life are too rough, when we're in over our heads, or when we feel like we're drowning, or when we simply need to stop the frantic paddling for a while and rest.

As beautiful as it is to say that the water of life will hold us, it is also true that sometimes it feels dangerous, and dark, and murky.

So for when life feels that way, just think about it. What holds you up? Or where do you find the trust that you will float, that you will survive?

This faith doesn't offer solutions, at least not ONE solution or salvation. But still, I trust that life preservers are all around us. Community. Beauty. Love. Purpose. Friends. Hope. Resilience. Laughter. Creator. Support. Smiles and hugs. Exploration. Reflection. Sharing. The mystery. The holy. A benevolent universe.

What are your life preservers? What or who is it that saves you? Can you trust it?

And if you can, what do you do with the reality that we've all had times when we feel unsupported, unsafe, and in danger. We've all witnessed the reality that not everyone survives, not everyone knows what it is to be held.

Life hold us, but it also can really rock our boats. We can drown.

And that's life. There's a hard-hitting poem by Audre Lorde's in our hymnal² which speaks to those of us standing hesitantly at the shoreline, perhaps wondering about entering the water. She says that it is better to show up knowing there are no guarantees...knowing that we were never meant to survive...than to hesitate in fear and silence.

Okay, that takes courage...something we don't always have. So what if we could also remember to trust? What if we collected the swim rings we need, took a deep breath, and jumped into life...both holding on and being held. I know with absolute certainty that swim rings, in many colours and forms, are available for each of us. And I also know with absolute certainty that there are people in this room, myself included, who are willing to be that life preserver for you, or to hold you up when you need it.

May we use our breath, our hearts, and our combined strengths as individuals to name

² #587 A Litany for Survival

our fears, hold one another up, and gently encourage each other to lie back and let the water of life hold us. Trust. The water will hold you.

WATER CEREMONY

Buoyant, Refreshing Waters of Hope and Anticipation (Gratitude, Bernadette Yao)

Rain in the Night, Waters of Longing, Loss, and Grief (La Misma Luna, Carlo Siliotto)

Tides of Restlessness – Waters of Change & Upheaval (I Crisantemi, Giacomo Puccini)

Soothing, Healing Waters of Reflection & Peace (Braes O' Auchtertyre, Kimberley Fraser)

Lifegiving Waters – Joy, Love, Connection (Legba, Boukman Eksperyans)

BLESSING THE WATER

Into this bowl we have poured water that represents all of us – all our shared questions, dreams, hopes, and values, and all our different journeys and backgrounds. This water, the water of our lives, has merged and been touched by other waters...and each individual contribution has joined to form a deep pool of love and support. The gifts and preciousness of each person are part of that whole...like waves in an ocean...a sea of love and connection that contains and remembers all that we have brought to it. You have brought waters to this place where you, and many others, will find nourishment and refreshment...this gathered community whose love can heal and transform. Blessed be these waters.

READING *A Future Not Our Own* ~ Bishop Ken Untener³

During our service, we adapted these words slightly for our context.

It helps now and then to step back and take a long view.

The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a fraction
of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of
saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us.
No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession
brings perfection, no pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the Church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives include everything.

This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one
day will grow. We water the seeds already planted
knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects
far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of

³ <https://bishopbillmcalilly.com/2018/02/07/a-future-not-our-own/>

liberation in realizing this.
This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning,
a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's
grace to enter and do the rest.
We may never see the end results, but that is the
difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not
messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.
So let the water hold you.

***CLOSING WORDS** *First Lesson*⁴ ~ Philip Booth

During our service, we adapted these words for inclusivity:

Lie back daughter, let your head
be tipped back in the cup of my hand.
Gently, and I will hold you. Spread
your arms wide, lie out on the stream
and look high at the gulls. A dead-
man's float is face down. You will dive
and swim soon enough where this tidewater
ebbs to the sea. Daughter, believe
me, when you tire on the long thrash
to your island, lie up, and survive.
As you float now, where I held you
and let go, remember when fear
cramps your heart what I told you:
lie gently and wide to the light-year
stars, lie back, and the sea will hold you.

Go in peace and love. Amen.

EXTINGUISHING THE FLAME

⁴ <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/first-lesson/>