

Sermon for Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Central Michigan
September 13, 2020
Rev. Andrew Frantz, contract minister

Water Ingathering

Thank you, Kendra, for sharing that story with us—and I want to connect my message to the message of the story and the spirit of the story¹. May we all be activists, as the author is, for clean water. May we all work for the day when clean water is available to everyone around the world—whether in Burkina Faso, or in the state of Michigan. May all families be able to share the blessing of clean water in their homes. This is a human right.

I'm wearing a new stole today. Last week I was in Maine with my sisters and they presented me with this stole. It was sewn by my sister Kathy. It was designed by my wife Mary. Mary asked more than a dozen of my family and close friends to each contribute a piece of fabric, and then Kathy put them together and sewed them into this stole. I only have one sister from Michigan and of course she is the one who sent this piece of fabric [fabric square shows the five great lakes in pale blue and the outline of the lower peninsula in pale yellow]. Many people who are on this call are Michiganders, and I think it's an identity of Michigan that it's a land of water.

In fact, yesterday I was on an airplane returning from my vacation in Maine, and in the row just in front of me was someone from Michigan. He was talking to someone else, who was asking him where he was flying to, and he said Michigan, and she wasn't really familiar with the place. And he said: *There's a lot of water there. A lot of lakes and rivers.* That's the first thing he said.

This is an identity of Michigan, the land of water. We are surrounded by the great lakes, some of the largest bodies of fresh water in the world; as well as inland lakes and rivers. This is a land of plentiful water. This is in sharp contrast to the land of west Africa, the setting of the story that Kendra just shared with us, where they have to walk miles to get their water. They walk for miles each way to get the water for all of their family's needs: drinking, cooking, and washing.

Some of us are familiar with the CROP Walk. This is a fund-raising walk which I participated in years ago in Ohio, and I know you have done it here too. It's a fund-raising walk to alleviate hunger. People walk for miles, and they ask people to pledge money to donate to them as they walk, and all of the money is divided to go to alleviate hunger in far away places, and to alleviate hunger right here. Because we know that we don't have to look to Africa or anywhere else to find hunger: it is here in our city; it is present wherever you may live. The motto of the CROP Walk is: *we walk because they walk*. Because of this reality that's in the story you just shared with us, Kendra, that so many people have to walk miles every day for their water. We walk because they walk.

But we don't have to look across the world to find a place where people lack the clean water they need. I'm thinking, of course, about Flint Michigan, where a couple of years ago there was such a well-known water crisis. I was serving then at a fellowship in Ohio and they collected

cases of bottled water as a service project, to deliver to the UU church in Flint to help the people of Flint. Because the people of Flint, the parents in Flint Michigan had to tell their own children: *don't drink the water because it's poison. Don't touch the water because the water it's poison.* In this land! This land of plentiful rivers and lakes. This is the life-giving element that falls from the sky for free, and the government responsible for protecting this resource in Flint Michigan allowed it to become poison. Sometimes there are natural reasons for clean water to be scarce, but this clean water crisis was caused by humans.

Friends, there's an election coming up—as you know—and your vote makes a difference in the people whom we elect and whom we entrust with our water. This sacred, precious resource. And there are differences between candidates and between political parties in terms of who supports issues like the clean water act and who doesn't. I urge you to do your research and to vote accordingly, as if our water depended on it. And it's not just the federal election. Of course we all are focused on the presidential election and the federal government, which does have a big impact on water policy, but this is a local issue as well. Here in the city of Mount Pleasant, one of the races that we will vote for is County Drain Commissioner. Not exactly a high-profile race, but it matters who we put in charge of our water systems and our drain systems. There are two candidates running in that race and again I urge you to do your research and choose the one who will best protect our water--our sacred water, including the sacred Chippewa River which flows through this city.

The last thing I want to say today about water is this: that bottled water is a sin. Now, I'm a Unitarian Universalist and I don't use the word "sin" that much, but I'm using it here. I say that bottled water is a sin because it goes against my deeply held values and beliefs. My deeply held belief is that clean, drinkable water is a human right. That we should all be able to go to our taps and turn it on and get it when we need it. It should not be something that we have to pay corporations for. When did it become normal for us to pay for water that's put into a plastic bottle and sold on a supermarket shelf instead of being able to get it for free out of our faucets? I don't want to buy into that system...unless I have to. This is why I say that bottled water is a sin: it's based on my deeply held belief that water is sacred, that it is god-given if you will, falling from the sky—and should not be controlled by corporations who sell it for a profit. Since I believe that this is morally wrong, I call it a sin. And I'm not saying that I'm holier than anyone else, that I have never "sinned." I do use bottled sometimes...but I try not to. My belief about water connects to our Unitarian Universalist belief that we are all connected, all of life and all of creation. As a living human I am connected to the well-being of the water on this planet.

I want to end by reminding us of our connections to one another. This whole hour we have been talking about the importance of water. In our ingathering service, we affirmed that we are connected to Unitarian Universalists across the country who mark this time of year with this water ingathering ritual. Reverend Susan Frederick-Gray reminded us of that in her video message.² We also held a cup of water during our ingathering to remind us that we are all made mostly of water. And in this knowledge, we are connected to every human around the globe: that we are made of water, and that we need water to survive. Water connects us. And we are

connected, finally, in the way that we are stewards of the water. We are the ones who must take care of the water today so that our children and our children's children can have clean, drinkable water after we are gone. Just as the generations who came before us protected the water and took care of it, for us to have today—the Chippewa River and the other fresh water that surrounds this beautiful state.

May we be true to our values. May we know that we are connected by love, by our connection to water, and by our belief in being good stewards of the land and the water.

May it be so.

¹ The Water Princess by Susan Verde and Georgie Badiel.

² "Ingathering 2020" video and article by Susan Frederick-Gray.

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