

Homily at Water Communion
Water Like Religion; Religion Like Water
delivered by Rev. Stephanie Shute Kelsch
at Second Parish in Hingham
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Things to Do

I'm going to talk about Water Communion for a few minutes now, but if any of you youngsters get to feeling restless while I do – let me just point out that there is a place in the order of service to draw or to list all the different ways water appears to us – like as oceans, ponds, rivers, the kitchen faucet and so on. Or maybe you'd like to draw or list all the different symbols there are for religions ... like a chalice, a cross, a fish, a Star of David, a star and crescent, yin and yan and more. If instead you'd like to just take your mind for a walk, here's a riddle for you to think about.

Human beings have been fascinated with riddles since ancient times. Not that any of you were around for it originally, but many of you know about the Riddle of the Sphinx from the Greeks. Others may think of riddles appearing on Bazooka Joe gum wrappers or in fortune cookies or in big fat books of "favorite jokes." So here's my riddle:

What two different things - each of which can take a wide range of forms - help human beings live, even though these two different things can cause both destruction OR peace?

So we've got things to draw, to list, to answer. And some of you can listen to me, too!

Drawn to Water

As I think about Water Communion, I'm always struck by how we are drawn so forcefully to water. People share water from their summer and over the years we hear about powerful moments in their lives, and they vary widely. There are moments of enormous peace, of great challenge, of overwhelming love, of deep heartbreak, of unrestrained laughter, of paralyzing fear, of welcome relaxation, of satisfying work. There is something

in all this diverse contemplation or interaction with water that transcends the physical experience and becomes full of profound meaning. It seems there is something in water that gives us greater awareness, and thus deeper experience – even though it may differ for each individual. But we are drawn to water, and there we seem to meet our deeper selves.

Wide Range of Water Experience

Appropriately enough, the range of water experience is reflected in the range and variety of water itself. Some find meaning in a roiling ocean; others in a gentle rain. Some find meaning in a refreshing glass of cool water; others in a rushing waterfall. One of the most compelling parts of Water Communion is hearing and telling all the different sources of water and all the unique ways of being moved. While water may be the common element, its forms and its effects are profoundly individual. We all need water to live physically, as the children and I discussed, but it seems water, in all its varied forms and all our varied responses to it, helps us to live spiritually – in our own personal way.

Parallel to Religion

Of course that spiritual component reminds me of religion. Throughout the history of the human race, people have been drawn to religion. We need *something* to worship, or to explain the mysteries, or to comfort and celebrate our human condition. Former nun and religion scholar Karen Armstrong points out that humans created gods almost as soon as they reached the stage of development we call human. (At the same point they created art, by the way.)

One could argue that religion, like water, is necessary for human life. It certainly has been important through the ages. And think of how it seems people will always make a religion of something ... worshipping God or goodness, or a political perspective, or wealth, or a country, or a sports team. (More on that next week!) The point for today is that – not unlike water - religion of some form seems a part of living.

And again, like water, the precise form practice of religion takes varies widely – Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Zoroastrianism being just some of the many different practices. But even within the scope of each religion there are great differences. In Christianity we've seen an enormous differences historically: combative soldiers of the Crusades and conscientious objectors of more recent wars; Trinitarians accepting three manifestations of a god and Unitarians Unitarians. Talk about individual differences! Our tent is so big it can include everything from those who view Jesus as the Son of God, those who see Jesus as human, to those who do not accept there is a god at all.

Answer to Riddle

I'm not being terribly subtle about the answer to my riddle, am I?

What two different things - each of which can take a wide range of forms - help human beings live, even though these two different things can cause destruction OR peace.

Water and religion. “Water Like Religion; Religion Like Water.” Similar in their powerful pull on our very being; similar in how they each help us live. Widely ranging in forms; capable of ill or of good. We can ‘gather at the river’ as the choir sang this morning. We can also fight over it. We can welcome the nourishing rain in a drought. We can also despair at the ice dams that cause damage in our homes.

At Second Parish we acknowledge, we accept, we strive to embrace the pull and the range of human spirituality. Water Communion today symbolizes that effort as we bring our individual water to a common container. In doing so, we symbolize our commitment to the good that can be done when people perceive the strength and richness in both physical and spiritual diversity. It is a communion, a “coming together” of enormous potential.