

Readings for 2009 Ingathering (9-13-09)

Carrying the Love – Erica Bartlett

Growing up in Casco, which is part of Lake Region, I took water for granted, not knowing anything different. I thought everyone had cool, clear, delicious mineral water from a well that was unavailable only when we lost power. I never considered that some kids didn't have a tiny pond across the street where they could go to look for tadpoles, frogs, turtles, or the elusive heron, tall and graceful and almost unearthly in certain lights. I didn't consider myself lucky to have a more sizeable pond (Thomas Pond in my case) just a quarter of a mile away, with friends who lived on it and would let us swim there whenever we chose, even sometimes at dusk, swimming through the fiery glow of sunset, or at night, with the universe reflected back to us in a multitude of stars.

All of this was simply part of my life, expected and relied upon and therefore not fully valued – until I went to college in Boston. At Northeastern, I quickly learned the benefits of a Brita water filter pitcher, and that expensive conditioners were a must to protect my hair from the damages of chlorine. I yearned for sights of clean water, only mildly comforted by the Fens, surrounded as they were by the detritus of the city and the belongings of the homeless. The Charles River didn't even qualify as water in my opinion, given that it was too polluted to support a healthy fish population. I don't know which disturbed me more, that, or when my friend Lea, who was on the crew team, got an infection when a cut on her hand was doused by the river.

It was only then that I began to think about what I loved about water, *why* its lack was so striking to me. I discovered that I cherished almost everything about it. Its life-giving properties. Its varying forms, from the ice that was clear enough once on Sebago Lake to see fish swimming below, to the flowing beauty of its liquid, to the gaseous clouds roaming the earth to spread the water I once knew elsewhere. Its ability to cleanse and purify. The way it can take on the shape of any container but is powerful enough to wear away stone.

I appreciated all of this, but something that moved me even more was water's ability to lend me buoyancy. At that time, when I was much heavier than I am now, water offered a wonderful sanctuary, carrying my body for me and at least temporarily protecting me from the worst of gravity's pull. It gave me a sense of freedom unlike anything else, a feeling of being cradled and supported.

I was reminded of this recently when thinking of all my responsibilities and feeling anything but buoyant. Work and family and friends would be enough, but as chair of the Worship Committee, I have particular concerns to attend to while Myke is on sabbatical. Nor am I alone in this. Many of us have taken on extra tasks during this time to keep things running smoothly – or at least, to make that attempt.

Additionally, Myke made some special deliveries on the day of her last service for the 2009 church year, when she was handing out stones to help people feel grounded when carried along by life's eddies and currents. In recognition of our new responsibilities, she presented a red heart to some of us and said, "This is to help you carry the love."

I don't know about anyone else, but for me, much as I appreciated the gesture, at the time it felt something like a burden, the stone weighing me down. Now, though, I realize it doesn't have to be. This congregation does not need me or even just a few individuals to carry that alone because we have created our own pool of love, of commitment and caring with one another. I felt again that wonderful buoyancy and freedom of floating in water when I understood that this love is not a burden to carry, it is there to carry me, and all of us. It will continue to do so as long as we remember to replenish that pool and keep it available to all. I like to think this is the well that Myke draws from when she writes her "Water From the Well" pieces, a resource that, like water, I didn't fully appreciate until I thought I had lost it. Knowing now that it is accessible to us all, I want to thank each of you for providing such a deep well to start us off. I know that as long as we remember to share of ourselves and our hearts, we will all carry the love together.

Reflection – Rick Kimball

Two years ago I co-authored a water curriculum to be published by the UUA for multi-generational use. It includes a meditation which asks participants to [MEDITATIVE VOICE] *Imagine that you are very small. . . You are as small as a drop of water. . . In fact you are a drop of water. . . A single drop of water. . . Ten thousand years ago you were a drop of water in a big ape. . . Today you are a drop of water in a famous woman athlete. . . running a long race, a marathon. . .* [NORMAL VOICE]

The meditation moves on with the runner. The drop emerges in the perspiration on her brow, vaporizes, rises into sky. [MEDITATIVE VOICE]

The air up there is cold. . . So cold it condenses the vapor. . . You come together again. You are a drop. . . You are part of a cloud. . . But the air is full. . . It cannot hold so much water. Precipitation begins. . . You fall back toward the earth, a drop of rain. . . You are over a lake and the lake collects you. [NORMAL VOICE]

The meditation ends, but the water cycle continues ever on.

Water rises and falls, through the cycle – moving at random, or is it by design? Who knows?

A lake forms – at random, by design. . . who knows?

We ourselves land together at this place, at this time. At random? By design?
Who knows?

A congregation forms. Both at random and by our own design. This we do know.

Countless drops must join to shape a canyon. Streams and rivulets and rivers
must join to fill a lake. So all of us must join to form and shape a congregation, to
be together what we desire, to do together what we wish.

Blessed be.