

It is great being here this morning. Thank you to all of you who have helped this moment happen. It takes a lot of people to make a worship service happen, the choir, the music director, Director of Lifespan Faith Development, members of the worship ministry team, ushers, our singers this morning, choir, minister, office administrator and the list goes on and on. Thank you.

Most summers end too quickly for me I must admit. I like the four seasons but summer seems too short. But this year, ... this year is different. I am especially pleased to be here this morning because this is our **First. Sunday. together.** This is a time of new beginnings. I don't really want the summer to end - but I am excited and full of anticipation as we start this new year. It has been so good to meet so many of you. And I am looking forward to meeting more of this community. And I hope that there will be new folks to welcome too! The possibilities seem endless at this moment.

The members of this church, as represented by a search committee, and by the Board of trustees, hired me to be your consulting minister. This is a new start and we are in it together. What dreams may come - we are in this together and that is a wonderful thing. Because face to face community is a precious thing nowadays.

For those of us who have been at First for awhile the summer can be a time of setting a different pace where some Sundays you might be here but you might also be somewhere else enjoying the beauty of nature, the love of friends or family, enjoying time of re-creation. But the year shifts and changes doesn't it? And so we come to that time when summer is coming to an end and our lives are possibly returning to more routine, or maybe just a different routine.

At this start of our church program year it is wonderful to gather together to reconnect to catch up with one another. We have a tradition, our water celebration. It is pretty northeast in its origins - since much of the US really does not have the lakes and ocean that the Northeast does. But in our time apart from one another one thing we will engage with is water. We can't avoid it. Hiking in the desert, swimming in a lake, bathing our babies, washing dishes - water will be with us. We cannot live without it.

And so later in this service we will co-mingle our waters a ritual that enacts our coming together here as this community in this time and place.

Rev. Amy Morgenstern describes it this way "The core symbolism of the Water [Celebration] is that we all come from water: as a species on a planet where life began in the ocean, as mammals who float in amniotic fluid as we are readied for birth, as beings whose cells are mostly water. ... We are separate and together, the way water scatters into rain and streams and clouds and springs and ponds and puddles and yet flows together again and again, one great planetary ocean. Not only is no drop of water superior to any other; all water comes from the same place."(

<http://sermonsinstones.com/2013/06/13/lifting-water-communion-above-privilege-and-trivia/> )

Rev. Amy points to the importance of water. Our bodies are about 60% water give or take. We are surrounded by water. Water gives us life. But she points out something more - it is not where we went or how we got the water that is important. You may have been able to go to the south of France, or you may have stayed by your kitchen sink. What is important is why that water is important to you. How did your experiences in summer change you - or not change you and why is that important.

We UUs we are a community that does not have a core creed, or one set of beliefs. It has often been said that we are a people of deeds not creeds. That is an important statement - deeds not creeds. What we **do** is way more importance than what we believe. What I do, what you do, on a personal level, is more important than what I

believe or what you believe. What we as a community **do** is more important than what we believe. Of course our values inform our actions and values matter. But ultimately *what we do is what matters*

One of the things that we do as UUs one of the things we are known for is welcoming folks. We have a long history of welcoming the heretics. Steve Jobs was not a Unitarian Universalist but he could have been describing us when he famously said, "Here's to the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in the square holes, the ones who see things differently. They're not fond of rules ... you can quote them, disagree with them, glorify them, or vilify them, but the only thing you can't do is ignore them because they change things ... we see genius, because the ones who are crazy enough to think that they can change the world are the ones who do." We have a long history, for a religious institution, of being the crazy ones, the misfits, of working to help change this world to be more welcoming to people who self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning. .... As a denomination we are working hard to find ways to be more welcoming to multiple cultures and peoples and bring down the walls that divide us on Sunday mornings, we as a denomination and as a congregation are working hard to build bridges across the generations so that all ages can find a meaningful community within and beyond these walls, as a denomination we are working toward finding a way to build bridges between the ends of the binary so that we can move beyond theist, atheist, conservative, liberal. This world is too complex for a simple binary way of thinking.

How do we move beyond this binary way of thinking that says either you are right or you are wrong, you are male or you are female, you conservative or you are liberal, you are ... it can go on and on. How do we do that? (pause) We each need to find our own way to that but I can tell you that there is one spiritual practice that will help - the practice of hospitality of welcoming.

This can be a challenge. This can be hard so hard. Because there is no creed, no litmus test of what makes a good UU or a bad UU it means that when we welcome folks we welcome all folks not just the ones we agree with. One definition of Spiritual practice is: “is the regular ... performance of actions and activities undertaken for the purpose of cultivating [spiritual development](#)” Why is welcoming a spiritual practice? To be done well it needs to be done regularly, and this is most important in order to really cultivate spiritual development or depth we must welcome and engage with those who are different than us. If I always talk to folks who live in the same bubble as me then I will never ever grow beyond that bubble. We all live in a bubble or our own making so before you go thinking about a friend or neighbor who needs this kind of spiritual practice think first about yourself and how you need this spiritual practice. How can you be more welcoming where can you stretch a bit just a bit beyond your comfort zone?

Welcoming can become our spiritual practice. We can become known as the church that welcomes folks, that is just courageous enough to believe that we can change the world.

And you are, we are a welcoming congregation. You all have welcomed me - you are bridging the gap reaching stretching and in that movement is the possibility of spiritual deepening. We have a strong tradition of rationality and humanism in our UU faith. And a wonderful tradition that is. There are many here who value that and for whom traditional religious language and practices and beliefs are uncomfortable. Many of us are looking for something deep and connective that is outside standard religious fare.

And as a denomination, although I have not seen it here, we sometimes are derisive of traditional religion, especially Christianity. And yet you are welcoming me, a UU minister who loves this UU faith and simultaneously self identifies as a Christian,

although a really liberal one! This community has the courage to know that there is a way to welcome a wide variety of faiths under one roof and for that I am very very happy.

And so we come together today from a variety of places, with a variety of gifts and needs. Engineers and artists, parents and non-parents, older folks, young folks, seekers, and those with answers. Some of us are doing well and some of us are just scraping by, we are confident, scared, tired, jazzed we are a swirling mixture of folks whose variation builds a harmony that is its own beauty.

This commingling of the waters this morning is like that mixture. The water will be changed and so will we.