

Welcome back everyone!!! We have this tradition in the Northeast part of Unitarian Universalism that in the summer we have a different kind of worship - lay led. Not all UU churches do it. And it is only in recent history that we UUS have had some kind of ingathering celebration. Early on the start of the fall was noted by the simple fact that the minister had returned from vacation. But for now it is the pattern we have - I enjoy it but I also have to say that it is wonderful to be back with you all.

This summer I ran across Lisa Kron's 2015 acceptance speech at the Tony's for Fun Home a musical that she co-wrote which is based on the graphic novel Fun Home by Alison Bechdel. In her speech she said "For many, many years I have had a dream, and I don't mean a metaphorical dream, I don't mean a Martin Luther King dream I mean an actual while I am sleeping dream. That I suddenly discover that the apartment I live in has all these rooms that I didn't know were there. And I am like how did I not know about all these rooms? And I have been thinking about that dream as I have been thinking about this amazing Broadway season because we all live in this big house and we all have been sitting in the same one or two main rooms and thinking that this is the whole house. And this season some lights got turned on in some other rooms and we are all like OMG this house is so much bigger than I thought, I didn't know that we had a garden I didn't know we had a freaking ballroom This pantry is full of food I had no idea. The thing is that all those rooms have always been there and there have always been interesting people in them doing ravishing things and wouldn't it be so great if after this season we did not all just go back into the living room - Our house is so big lets not just all go back into the living room"

I was taken with that bit of her speech. First it is funny - who wouldn't know all the rooms in their house. And I remember working with a client who was at a

point in his life where there was much change and much personal growth. And he had a recurring dream of being in his home and discovering rooms that were unknown to him. Her image in the speech is powerful. And what she is saying is that there are moments when our capacity grows so fast we don't always know how we have grown - or times when we get so focused on the thing that is right in front of us that we forget how much we are capable of. And we already have that capacity - Our house is already big.

This is our ingathering Sunday where we welcome each other back -and it is a hard time to be welcoming and celebrate isn't it? I would guess that we all know someone who has been affected by hurricane Harvey or Irma, or perhaps you know someone out West who is worried about all the forest fires. It is hard to celebrate when we know that others are suffering.

It is why I think it is important to know what the history of our water celebration is because it actually is a relatively new ritual in our larger UU world.

It was first celebrated in 1980 and it came to be in the midst of time when the UUA grappling with its institutional sexism. "In 1975, Lucile Shuck Longview, , served as the UU delegate to the United Nations "Women's Year" assembly in Mexico City. She returned from that meeting convinced that religion, even her beloved Unitarian Universalism, was a chief culprit in the perpetuation of oppressive sexism." When Lucile got back from that meeting in Mexico city she started to work on her own and with others to put pressure on the UUA to change to break from their ingrained sexism. In 1977 the UUA passed the "Women and Religion" Resolution which called for an intensive examination of the "sexism inherent in religious literature and institutions" -beginning with the UUA itself. Because of the work that Lucile and other women did the UUA

updated our principles in 1985 so that the language was inclusive, or at least more inclusive." Until 1985 we did not explicitly affirm the dignity of every person, not did we affirm the interdependent web of life - those beloved principles were not original. We found new rooms in our faith - we welcomed more and different people into our faith and we are better for it. Remember that as we as a congregation and as a denomination wrestle with our own white privilege and our own racism

"The path from Longview's 1975 experience with the United Nations to the General Assembly in 1985 was long and difficult. In between those two benchmark dates there were countless meetings, conversations, and worship services that served as profound spiritual explorations of the sought after transformations. The first "water ritual" was part of one such worship service, "Coming Home, Like Rivers to the Sea," which was designed for the UU Women and Religion Continental Convocation held in East Lansing, Michigan, in 1980."

The first water ritual was not made up by ministers or by the UUA in Boston it was created by women as a way of connecting with and affirming each other and their work. From that first water ritual are these words

*Celebrating now our connectedness, we choose water as our symbol of our empowerment. As rivers in cycle release their waters and regain new beginnings, so do we cycle. For us as women these beginnings are powerful, but not easy. But still we come to create and to celebrate and to live by the only spirituality worthy of our devotion—a spirituality that uplifts, empowers and connects.*

That first water ritual was not about summer vacation. It was about coming

together being with one another. When small springs join with other small springs creeks are made and when small creeks join with other small creeks rivers are made and when rivers join together oceans are made. The symbol of water was chosen because there is power in that symbol. *These beginnings are powerful, but not easy.*

Water can heal and give life, and it can harm - we are seeing that in the news today and the past two weeks. But still there is power in coming together for sure. *These beginnings are powerful, but not easy.*

This past summer I actually travelled less. It was my husbands and my 20th wedding anniversary, in June. Our anniversary always falls at the same time as our UU national meeting General Assembly. Often I am away for our anniversary but this year I promised him that we would be together for our anniversary.

I was able to take my study leave and stay in one place, which meant I really did have more time to step back, ponder the upcoming year and reconnect with my spiritual journey. It was a little bit a sabbath time

I ended this summer wondering what it would be like if each of us thought about our travels and our time this past summer as sabbath. I am sure there are a variety of fun stories and fond memories of travel and adventures this past summer but what would it be like if each of you thought about your time as sacred and as part of your spiritual journey.

What difference would that make you might be asking? Perhaps I am just talking minister talk and have lost sight of the real life where tasks must be done and vacations are a lot of work.

When you or I take some time to reconnect with our soul, with nature, with those we love. When we make the effort to let go - even a little - of the huge list of stuff to do We change and we grow and our capacity to love, to welcome becomes stronger - *these beginnings are powerful, but not easy. And in them* our house gets even bigger.

And this is why I think it is really important for each of us to to create special time, sabbath time, sacred time. It builds capacity. Going somewhere and having an adventure and a vacation helps but when you take time to step back and consider what does the world want of you, and how is the sacred in your life, what makes you say WOW and THANKS.

WOW and THANKS and our coming together to celebrate where we have been and that we are back together - it deepens us and it builds our capacity - it makes our house bigger. And then we can respond to the needs of the world. Without celebration without connection we burn out. So let us take time to celebrate. Let us remember that water is powerful and in part it is that power that makes it sacred. Let us remember to say Wow and Thanks.

And I offer us this challenge: What would happen if our congregation as a community asked these questions of ourselves - What makes us say WOW and THANKS? , What does the world want of us? how is the sacred here in this community? If we work at answering those questions we will find our extra rooms, we will become more than we are and we will invite people in to share in this community. So lets not all go back into the well worn living room lets invite people into our house - it is so big.

Blessed Be.

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All quotes taken from this document

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