

# Worthy Waters

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

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Water Ducklings - Copyright © 2020 Rodrigo Emilio Solano-Quesnel

Every once in a while, I get a chance to visit St. Joseph’s Oratory in Montreal. It’s a large church building – the biggest in Canada, including powerful architecture, and an immersive setting and rich storytelling, that gives you a sense of Montreal’s Catholic heritage.

One of the places I sometimes visit when I’m there, is an unassuming room, with a steel water tank. They give the water away, though if you don’t have a container of your own, you can get one of these bottles for a dollar, and fill them.

I’m always intrigued by *what* makes this water so special, to the extent that it is labeled *holy water*.

Well, it turns out the bottle contains a set of “ingredients” or “instructions” of sorts. It turns out that holy water is not all that different than regular water – the secret ingredient is a blessing.

On the label, it explains that “To bless is to wish someone well”. In the case of the kind of holy water that you find at places like St. Joseph’s Oratory, the water has been blessed by a priest, someone who has a job kind of like mine.

But Unitarian Universalists affirm what is sometimes called, the *priesthood of all believers* – these days we might phrase it something like the *ministry of all the faithful*.

And in fact, the water that I got there was blessed, not just by a priest, but also by the people who came along in my journeys to the Oratory. In fact, when I started running out of this water, I had a chance to fill it more recently with water from a place where I had a holiday with my partner. In any case, the water reminded me of the blessings I had by the people who are sometimes with me, and by the places where I can find this water.

So, I believe that, no matter where we are, we always have access to holy water of sorts – *worthy water* that has been blessed by people and places that mean us well.

Any of us who've lived in Essex county for any length of time, owe a great deal of our lives to this – tap water brought to us by grace of the County Waterworks. It is a simple substance, yet a miracle of civil engineering.

What is inside our glasses has been around for a long time, and has been used before for uncountable uses. It has been inside people and animals. It has been sailed, and skated on.

And before coming out of the tap, it has been graced by the powerful forces of science – physics, chemistry, and biology – gravity to separate it from heavier objects, substances to clear it, and living organisms to transform it from poisonous sludge, into life-giving drink.

It is blessed by the lives it has touched before, and by the lives that have cared for it. It is worthy water. It is holy water.

This water is easy to get – it is safe to wash with, cook with, and drink.

There are other waters that tell similar stories.

A few years ago, I visited my old home, which was in the old Olympic Village, from the 1968 Mexico City Olympics. During my visit, I was able to stay in my old room, where I growing up.

While I was there, I often wondered about the athletes who lived there for a couple of weeks in October of 1968. I wondered about who lived in my room, while getting ready for their event – Did they win a medal? Did they come to represent their country regardless of the outcome? How were they welcome when they got back home?

Some of you might remember that it was at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, when Tommie Smith or John Carlos made their remarkable Black Power salute, and they were not welcome by everyone in their home country.

I wondered about the athletes' morning routines – how they felt as they used my shower, flushed my toilet, and washed their hands in my sink. And I wondered – did they drink the water?

When I lived there in the 80s, we didn't drink the water from those taps. At least not directly. My mom taught me to boil the water for several minutes, and then taught me to have patience as it cooled down. We usually prepared batches in advance, but occasionally a lack of foresight meant, I had to go thirsty for longer than I expected.

When I go there now, we usually drink water from large 40L bottles, as has become the norm in Mexico. The one from the taps is not *necessarily* harmful... but it carries enough risk that we've learned to take precautions.

And while that water might not be safe to drink, it is holy to me, I see it as blessed from its source, which has been graced by the presence of unknown athletes; unknown and known tenants over half a century; family and friends, who shared that tap with me, when it was the source for cleaning and preparing for the day and the night. By their grace, that was worthy water.

On an early September day like today, it is often customary in Unitarian Universalist congregations to hold a ritual where we can bring water

from places we might have visited over the summer. Water that feels special because of a place that might have become special to us by our presence there.

That dynamic is less feasible these days... Even if you did manage to visit some place and bring water from there, it is tricky for us to have these different waters poured in together.

And yet, all of you today, have special water with you. Water that has been made holy by virtue of being next to you and accessible – ready to bring you life.

Most of you will have been able to bring drinkable water straight out of your taps, graced by the engineering marvels of our local waterworks around the county.

Now, over the summer a few households in rural Leamington were not able to do that, as a boil-water advisory was given in a limited space in town.

Even *that* water is special, and with a bit of extra care, it was possible to transform it into life-giving liquid – by boiling it – just as my family did at the old Olympic Village in Mexico City.

So, we see that any water can become special water – worthy water. Whether it comes from far and exotic places, or from just a few steps away, where you live. With some special care and intention, even the most brackish of waters can become a blessing to anyone and everyone.

Let us, together, partake in sharing this worthy water. While we are apart, we may all drink from the same kind of water together. Water that has been blessed by many others. Worthy water.

In Solidarity,  
Amen.

*Suggested Hymns:***Closing Hymn #1064 Blue Boat Home**

~)| Words: Peter Mayer, 1963- , © 2002 Peter Mayer

Music: Roland Hugh Prichard, 1811-1887, adapted by Peter Mayer, 1963 - ,

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~)| keyboard arr. Jason Shelton, 1972 -

HYFRYDOL

**Opening Hymn #145 As Tranquil Streams**

~)| W: Marion Franklin Ham, 1867-1956

M: *Musicalisches Hand-buch*, Hamburg, 1690, adapt.

WINCHESTER NEW

**Hymn #113 Where Is Our Holy Church?**

Words: Edwin Henry Wilson, 1898-1993 ~)| © 1992 Unitarian Universalist Association

Music: Genevan psalter, 1551, adapt. By William Crotch, 1775-1847

ST. MICHAEL