

The Humours

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

Rev. Rodrigo Emilio Solano-Quesnel

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"Meeting Waves" © 2021 Rod E.S.Q.

If you've ever followed the history of medicine, you might have been intrigued by an ancient Greek view about human health, which attributed different ailments, emotions, and healing methods to the balance of four fluids in the body. These fluids, or humours, were labeled as: blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm, and while those labels may sound familiar, those words were used to describe different things than what we would now associate with those names.

I won't go into the details of what these humours were, because our medical understanding nowadays is much different. But I bring them to mind today because each of those humours were associated with different moods or personality types.

Someone who was thought to have more "blood" than usual was labelled *sanguine*, and was seen as lively, and perhaps more joyful than others. If the imbalance was in "yellow bile", then they were seen as *choleric* and prone to anger and rage. If it was a matter of "black bile" – or literally in Greek, *melancholy* – then they were seen as prone to

sadness. And the folks labeled as *phlegmatic* tended to be seen, among other things, as more mellow or reserved.

This is a gross oversimplification. And I'm offering this overview because, to me, the most useful part of this... classification method, was that it named *real* moods – emotional experiences that real people go through.

And today, I invite us to do that – to recognize our multitude of overlapping moods and emotions – with a different kind of humour... (a humour, is essentially a liquid or fluid – it's where we get the word *humid*). And our humour today is water.

A ritual that many of our congregations do around this time of year, is a water ceremony that honours these emotional experiences. One way to do that is to lay out four vessels for us to give witness to some of our emotional experiences as we transition from the summer days and into our new church year.

This was an eventful summer around the world, and chances are that there were some events in your personal lives as well. A range of overlapping, and perhaps conflicting, emotions may have resulted from this, and it's OK to recognize more than one at the same time.

So, we can lay out vessels for: recognizing joy, happiness, amusement, or other kinds of enjoyable experiences; another one for acknowledging anger, rage, fear, or other bold and sometimes unpleasant experiences; another vessel to honour sadness, grief, or otherwise a sense of loss that we might have encountered around this time; and a vessel to hold our sense of hope, for peace, for a sense of renewing faith, as we come together at this time.

I have short reflections for each of these moods, and pouring some water in a vessel for each of them may be a way for each of us to recognize these states of mind. You're welcome to set vessels of your

own at home and follow your own ritual, or you can simply bear witness to the reflections included here.

Joy, Amusement, Pleasantness

Following the Nobel prizes earlier this year, the 2021 *Ig Nobel* prizes were awarded this past week. (More accurately, it was called “the 31st First Annual Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony”). This awards ceremony is usually hosted from Harvard University, but was done online for the second time this year. The *Ig Nobel* prizes are awarded to real scientific research that [quote] “first makes you laugh, and then makes you think”.

Among this year’s winners, was research seeking to demonstrate that transporting rhinoceroses upside down is better for them than transporting them on their side – this is surprisingly important knowledge for wildlife veterinarians, who occasionally need to transport ailing rhinos while minimizing harm to them; there was also a study that supports the hypothesis that humans evolved beards as protection from being punched in the face... which can lead to further lines of inquiry; and there was a study that catalogued the array of microorganisms on sidewalk chewing gum, which may offer unexpected insights in the realm of microbiology. There were a total of ten awards, spanning six continents, and I invite you to look them up if you enjoy the combo of laughing and thinking.

These may not sound like ground-breaking research, but as laughable as they may initially sound, each of these endeavours adds to the sum of human knowledge in more profound ways than meet the eye at first glance – they first make you laugh, and then make you think.

Laughter, and by extension any kind of enjoyment, is a basic element in our human existence, and this past summer may have offered many of you with opportunities to find some kind of enjoyment, be it time to rest, or to get to do something you don’t regularly get to do, or perhaps laugh a bit more often... and maybe to think for a bit longer.

Around the Windsor-Essex area, with the Detroit River, and Lakes Erie and St. Clair, water can be a part of summer, even if it's just a quick view from the street while walking downtown... sometimes, it can be something more engaging, like a day at the beach or a walk on the riverside.

And sometimes, it's as simple as a cold drink on a hot day.

Pouring this water may help us recognize the moments of joy that we have coming into our reconvening this year, or that we look forward to as we engage in this community again.

Suggested Meditation Music – *Ode to Joy* by Ludwig van Beethoven

Anger, Rage, and Fear

Among the news this summer and into the fall, we've witnessed the frightening developments in Afghanistan, where many people have been desperate to leave, fearing for their lives. And fear often begets anger. Many people around the world have strong feelings about the near-twenty-year war that has just ended.

Along with that comes the memory of the attacks that happened on a clear Tuesday morning 20 years ago. Many of us remember the fear that came with that day, along with the anger that led to many decisions and world events over these past 20 years.

I remember being invited to a Thanksgiving dinner on October 8, 2001, and learning over the dinner that the bombing of Afghanistan had started the previous day. It sobering to consider that it's only less than a couple weeks ago that that war ended.

The decisions leading to that war have become divisive and we also see that divisiveness around many other issues today: around social and racial justice, around health policy, and around environmental action.

Among our environmental fears, we have witnessed the stormy seas and rainy gales that have come with multiple hurricanes this season, many of them hitting both far away and closer to home.

These stormy fears and this anger are part of our world and our own personal lives, and we can acknowledge it here.

Suggested Meditation Music – *Storm Warning* by Frank Mills

Sadness, Grief, Loss

Many of us have experienced loss around this time, or may wonder if we may be facing some kind of loss in the coming days.

In the world, we are witnessing the loss of women's rights in Afghanistan. And over the past year or so, we have seen the loss of health and life due to the pandemic... and other reasons.

With yesterday's anniversary, many remember the sacrifice given by First Responders in the performance of their duties – simply doing their daily job during a disaster. And this echoes with the experience of many First Responders over the past couple of years, who have given so much of themselves, including their lives, in the performance of their duties during crisis.

With water, we recognize the tears of sadness, literal and proverbial, that may be part of our lives and of our world.

Suggested Meditation Music – *Nocturne* by Martha Mier

Hope, Peace, Faith

When we talk about the time 20 years ago, the narrative usually mentions both Twin Towers in New York City... it *often* also includes

the Pentagon in Washington D.C., and... *sometimes* there's a mention of a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

Of course, the symbolism of Wall Street and the US Department of Defence amid the smoke, along with the numerous casualties involved, bring easily-recognizable images. But sometimes I wonder if an oft-missing headline from 20 years ago, was that field near Shanksville...

Of the four flights that were crashed just over twenty years ago, flight 93 was the only one that didn't reach its target.

And that wasn't an accident – it is believed that deliberate action by passengers in that flight prevented it from reaching Washington D.C. and causing even greater harm.

After the closing of Kabul's international airport at the end of August, it has just been announced, a couple of days ago, that a new civilian flight left Kabul's international airport – the first in a couple of weeks – bringing people to a safer place, over a week after it was doubtful that this would be possible.

Even amid extreme adversity, there is hope. And faith, in its many manifestations, can help us find a glimpse of peace.

This month there were elections in Morocco and Sao Tome – these are complicated things, and... they always leave space for change... maybe for the better. Here in Canada, we are heading into our own election, and wherever you stand in it, it offers some opportunity for a better life in our country and in the planet.

Water may offer witness to floods of hope, and tranquil streams of peace, that feed growth and change.

Suggested Meditation Music – *How Can I Keep from Singing?* Traditional

And so, my friends, with the fluid form of these waters, we witness to our moods – to our shared and personal emotional experience that comes with this transitional time, as we face our past, and look to our future.

My friends, may the witness of these humours offer more balance in our lives.

So may it be,
In Solidarity, in Love, and in Peace
Amen

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Opening Hymn #209 O Come, You Longing Thirsty Souls

Words: Isaiah 55, metrical version

Music: English melody, harmony by Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1872-1958, used by perm. of Oxford University Press

FOREST GREEN

Meditation Hymn – #4 *I Brought My Spirit to the Sea*

~)-| Words: Max Kapp, 1904-1979

Music: Alec Wyton, 1921- , © 1990 Alec Wyton

JACQUI

Closing Hymn #145 As Tranquil Streams

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

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

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