

## **Sermon: Streams of Love (Laurel)**

We UUs have been talking a lot about love as we collectively consider our core guiding principles. This is an effort to be more fully ourselves in this ever changing world. There is, understandably, a lot of cynicism about religion in our country because there can be such a disconnect between claims of holiness as a justification for cruelty and actual sacred care of one another.

We Unitarian Universalists don't do creeds, we assume a pluralism of belief in our own communities and in the world. But we do do accountability. Because we are a people of a covenant, people bound by a promise of care and the awareness that what we do affects each other.

And so when we look at our new proposed principles, which puts an ethic of love at the center of our values, we are leaning further into that commitment to care. This is an important choice given the landscape of our country and culture.

Our country seems caught between a kind of cruel individualism that cries out "freedom" but really means acting without consequence or accountability, on the one hand, and a renewed awareness that we are all profoundly interconnected and we have more power for good together than we do on our own.

This is fundamentally a struggle of individualism versus collectivism.

Individualism says that the individual matters more than the collective. Someone has the right to win and everyone else be damned.

Collectivism says that all flourishing is mutual, so we do this together. We gather all our drops together into great streams of love.

Because Unitarian Universalism encourages the individual search for meaning and a democratic process in which everyone gets to vote their own conscience, there are pockets of our denomination that hold those principles over our interconnectedness and our commitment to inherent worth. Individualism can be cruel.

So there is this effort to recalibrate what we mean by Unitarian Universalism, to be clearer about our commitments. To say that all the values we hold dear are rooted in a deep ethic of love.

The new proposed language begins this way:

Love is the power that holds us together and is at the center of our shared values. We are accountable to one another for doing the work of living our shared values through the spiritual discipline of Love.

Inseparable from one another, these shared values are: interdependence, equity, transformation, pluralism, generosity, and justice.

So why talk about this during a water communion service? Rituals are important and often quite informative. The things we give import to speak of what we value, what we hold up as sacred, and helps us internalize those values with greater intent.

Here's what we don't do on this ingathering water communion Sunday: we do not begin with a single vessel of water, set apart from all of you. We do not divide that water into smaller vessels so that each of you takes away your individual piece. We do not call division sacred.

Here's what we do: we invite everyone to bring water to church and if you don't have any, we give you some at the door so that everyone can participate. We reflect on the sacredness of coming together, of regathering at the start of a new church year, and then we all bring our vessels of water and pour them together into one larger vessel. We pool what we have and call that collection, that pail full of drops of water, those streams of love, we call *that* sacred. We give *that* our blessing. And then we use that water to continue to offer blessings to our community.

The word communion comes from the Latin "*communio*" meaning "fellowship, mutual participation, a sharing."

Our water communion service is about just that, gathering back together in fellowship, a sense of mutual engagement, and sharing.

So I want us all to be intentional today, on this ingathering Sunday, about the power of our collective love and care for this congregation as we enter this new year together.

I'm going to ask our ushers to come around with extra water for anyone who needs it. Please raise your hand if you still need water. I will purify this water before we use it.

Your love for this community, for your family and friends and your self, your love for the world belongs here. Your vision for what and who we can be together belongs here, in this sacred collective, among these streams of love. In this place where we have so much more capacity for hope and sustenance and world-building imagination than we ever have on our own.

Before you come up to add your water to our collective vessel, I want to invite you to reflect on your love for this community. Maybe imagine that love as a bright warmth in your chest, spreading down your arms, moving from your hands through the cup or container you're holding, swirling through that water, infusing it until it has been made new with your love. Maybe you want to imagine that your love has a color, and like tea steeping a new color is blooming into that water.

Kimberly will play some music while we sit and infuse our water with love. When you're ready, I invite you to come forward and add your sacred water to our communal water, blending our love and our care together as we do in this congregation, making a bigger kind of love, the kind that exists not only in us but among us all together.