

“What Do You Bring?”

A homily by the Rev. Dr. Stephanie May
September 11, 2016

After a summer of drought, does a service honoring the gift of water arrive with a deeper note of gratitude than usual? Brown lawns, wilted gardens, and even withered trees reflect the paucity of water we've had these past months. Indeed, by its absence, the power of water to foster life is abundantly clear. Without water, life struggles, gasping for drink as life weakens and fades. While water may not be all that life needs to thrive, it is a necessary element for all known life forms. Indeed, in the search for life on other planets, looking for the presence of water has long been key.

As a foundation for life, water plays an important role in many religious rituals—including our own today. In a few minutes, you will be invited to come forward to add a bit of water to the common bowl. This mingling of waters is a symbol of reconnecting as a community. The symbolism reminds us of how we arrive as individuals and then join into a common purpose—a purpose that we articulate each week as we light the chalice and recite our covenant.

Yet, I wonder...could the water also symbolize a *watering* of the life of this congregation?

To explain, let's go back to the last time we gathered in the sanctuary last June for Flower Sunday. On that day, we celebrated with flowers and a ceremony of gratitude. Those present were invited to write down a favorite moment from the year on a sticky note. These notes were collected, shared out loud, and posted as “leaves” on the branches of a tree. These leaves represented the life of the congregation that had flourished over the year.

So why is there a poster of “roots” up front today beside the poster of leaves? The life of a tree flourishes by roots that go deeply into the soil and draw the water up into the branches. Today, I want us to consider in what ways we might help the life of the congregation to flourish this year? In what way can you help water the roots? What do you bring to nurture our life together?

In asking this question, I am *not* trying to cleverly ask how you are going to volunteer this year! As I've said before, I believe that your engagement with First Parish—with religious life—should nurture your spirit, not suck the energy out of you. So, even if we're short of volunteers here or there, my hope is that you will engage in those things that also bring you a sense of renewal, of feeling as if your roots have been watered.

And yet, I believe each of us has something to bring that helps life to flourish in our community. You may bring listening ears that delight in the sounds of the choir. You may bring a warm welcome to the person sitting beside you in the pew or walking through the door for the first time. You may bring a love of teaching, of singing, of preserving our

archives. You may bring the flowers or make the coffee. You may bring your laughter and sense of mirth. You may bring a question to a book discussion or a pair of feet to march in a protest. You may bring your wallet to Dining for Dollars or Undecorate the Christmas Tree or to fulfilling your annual pledge. You may bring your children to be raised as more spiritual and ethical persons. Or, you may bring yourself to simply be here and to be a silent witness to the importance that we are here.

What we bring is like the water that falls upon the soil and soaks into the roots so that life might flourish. And so today as we add our water to the common bowl, I invite you to also share what you bring to help life flourish this year. Don't worry, you have some time to think as the offering is received! When you've identified one thing that you bring, please write it on a sticky note you'll find in the order of service. Some of you may have longer lists, but please only write one gift that you bring. If you need a sticky, the ushers will have extras as they pass through the sanctuary.

As a community, our common life flourishes by all that we each bring. As we affirm in our first principle, every life has worth and dignity. Let us celebrate what each brings to our life together.