"Free Flowin'"

A Reflection by the Rev. Dr. Stephanie May
First Parish in Wayland
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In case you're wondering…yes, the sermon title is a poor pun on the Tom Petty song "Free Fallin'". But, don't worry, I'm not going to sing alternative lyrics as my sermon!

The title emerged as I watched the news over the last couple of weeks. I began by considering how we usually take a celebratory tone towards water as a metaphor of life and community coming together. Indeed, we *need* water. We need to drink water. The plants we eat need water. We need water to stay healthy and clean—even when we do not want to take a bath or brush our teeth.

And yet, the flooding in Texas from Hurricane Harvey clearly demonstrated how water can also be destructive. Water simply flows to fill spaces. Water can seep through the smallest cracks. And rushing water can take down trees, toss a car, and crash through barriers.

Of course, we make efforts to contain water. I noticed this over the summer while I hiked. All along the trails, the route would be interrupted with carefully placed logs or rocks that were designed to channel water off the trail and down the mountainside. Have you seen this? Of course, our cities and towns have far more elaborate ways to contain and channel water with pipes, sewers, and reservoirs. Such waterworks are remarkable achievements, but sometimes they still fail or break or are simply inadequate to rains like those that fell in Hurricane Harvey.

Then, as our eyes were watching Harvey, the news broke about the decision to end the DACA program, which gave a path for undocumented persons who were brought to this country as children to be here legally. In hearing this news against the backdrop of Harvey, I was struck by the thought of how rain and weather crosses borders all the time, but the movement of people across borders is often restricted. And yet, like water that can refuse to be contained, people continue to cross over national boundaries in the U.S. and in countries around the globe.

Reflecting on these global flows of people, I then considered who can and cannot flow over borders and for what reasons. I reflected on how such movement can be a privilege of nationality, money, family connections, or education. In Harvey, some people were afraid to move for fear of being stopped by police and having their immigrant status questioned. In Irma, Harvey, and Katrina, some people did not have the money to move—no reliable car or money for gas or hotels.

Moving across boundaries of towns, states, or nations can enable pursuit of safety, of opportunity, or of new experiences and pleasures. Over this summer, I suspect many of us enjoyed opportunities to travel, to explore new towns or states, and maybe even different countries. And yet, some of us did not travel—whether because of health, finances, or other commitments or preferences that kept us close to home. Whatever our summers looked like and wherever our water may have come from, my hope is that we all take a moment to be grateful for the opportunities of movement—of freely flowing—that so many of us enjoy. And in these reflections, perhaps we will also consider anew the lives of those whose movement is limited and wonder why.

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I am glad we have all moved in ways that brought us here today. Like freely flowin' water, may we all be able to journey through life in the ways that we need.

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