"Trickles and Floods"

A Homily by the Rev. Dr. Stephanie May
First Parish in Wayland
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When I think of the cycles of water, a poem by Wendell Berry usually comes to mind:

All that passes descends,

and ascends again unseen

into the light: the river

coming down from the sky

to hills, from hills to sea,

and carving as it moves,

to rise invisible,

gathered to light, to return

again...

By changing form, water traverses the earth and sky. Snowflakes that fall on top of a mountain become snowmelt that trickles into a stream. . .then joins with thousands of trickles to become a fierce river of white water… and maybe even a flood.

It is sometimes said, "Oh, if these could talk!" In the same vein, what if the water could remember all the places it has been? What if the water remembered falling as a snowflake or as a tear? What if the water remembered rushing through a canyon or being gulped by a sweaty kid on a hot summer day?

Imagine all that water could have seen. Poet rupi kaur writes,

I am water.

Soft enough
To offer life

Tough enough
To drown it away.

Water is there at the beginning as our first wet and warm home in a womb. Water is there at the end in tears that carry a flood of grief. What if the water remembers all of this?

Of course, there is no science that argues for the memory of water! But in this ceremony today, we use water to carry our memories of the places of meaning we have seen this summer. And when we pour a trickle of our water into a common bowl, we are pouring a part of us: our memories, our joys, and perhaps some painful or complex memories as well.

By combining each little bit of water into one common bowl, we are affirming a truth that brings us back again and again into this space: *it matters that we are together.* It matters that we are not alone.

It matters that we have communities where we can bring the places we have been, the passions that ignite our actions, and the abilities we have to listen, to sing, to teach, to ask a good question, to be a good friend, to lead a committee, to haul folding chairs, to drive to a rally, to extend a hand to a new face.

Together our trickles of water fill a bowl. Together our individual gifts, actions, and intentions make us who we are as a congregation.

And so I ask—who do *we* want to be? What is *your* <u>hope</u> for this new year—for yourself, your family, or First Parish? Put differently, what is your <u>intention</u> for this new year—to what do you want to direct your vision and attention?

Each of these wishes, hopes, and intentions that we bring into the year will become the proverbial water that joins together to become our community. They water the roots of our tree to help life to flourish.

So please write your hope or intention on the blue rain drop in your order of service. In a moment we will share both our trickles of actual water as well as these paper raindrops.

As you write, the offering will be received and the choir will sing a new song by a UU composer, Jason Shelton. Written for Water Sunday, the song suggests the water *does* remember its journey through the myriad places and experiences of life. May the song help inspire your own reflections on where you and we may journey this year.