



# Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

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## “Holy Waters, Make Us One”

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At the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, GA

### Centering Thoughts

*When you drink from the stream, remember the spring.* Chinese proverb

*It cannot be right, in the ecological sense, for a farmer to drain the last marsh, graze the last woods, or slash the last grove in his community, because in doing so he evicts a fauna, a flora, and a landscape whose membership in the community is older than his own, and is equally entitled to respect.* Aldo Leopold

*One way to open your eyes is to ask yourself, “What if I had never seen this before? What if I knew I would never see it again?”* Rachel Carson

*All the water that will ever be is right now.* National Geographic

### Homily

When water crashes against rocks by the ocean or trickles over leaves and pebbles in a mountain stream, it picks up and absorbs trace mineral elements. Water tastes, smells, and looks in accord with where it’s been.

As we journey through our own lives, we, too, pick up and absorb traces of our experiences. Just as water is changed by what it touches, so are we changed. And, we also change what we touch, one of the many ways we prove our interconnectedness with all that exists.

Everything—plants, animals, and people—are not only interconnected, but interdependent. And we jointly depend on water to bring forth new life and sustain all life.

This past year we’ve seen drought devastate agricultural fields in our western states and floods destroy towns in the mid-west and northeast. Drinking water in several states has been impacted by algae blooms or pollution. Countries beyond our borders face similar problems. The United Nations reports that nearly 900 million people currently live in areas without access to clean drinking water. And the numbers are climbing.

Although our planet is 71% water, it is not all drinkable. Freshwater accounts for only 3.5% of the existing water, with more than half of that trapped in glaciers.

A week ago, my husband, Paul, and I returned from a trip to Alaska. Before they disappear, we went to see glaciers and the animals and plants that depend upon the glaciers. We were amazed by whales, seals, puffins, salmon, even grizzly bears, moose and caribou. Sadly, we saw evidence that glaciers are disappearing. At more than one site we were shown how much the glaciers have retreated in recent decades. As we entered a part of the Kenai Fjords National Park so we could hike up to a glacier, we drove past signs with dates indicating where the glacier had once ended. These signposts felt a bit like grave markers for a dying glacier.

Later, we took a day boat trip on the ocean. The glaciers we observed from the water stopped at land's end, but we were told they once covered the very bays we were cruising through. The pace of glacial retreat is increasing as global temperatures rise.

Glaciers retreat when the balance between winter snowfall and summer melt is disrupted. When winters are shorter and warmer and less snow falls, the glaciers don't grow. When summers are longer and warmer then greater melting occurs. Unless the balance is restored, the glaciers that have existed for millennia will disappear completely.

When that day arrives we will mourn their lost beauty, and we will grieve the passing of the animals, plants, and people that depend upon them. For now, the regular seasonal glacier melt sustains high-mountain habitats. But if the glaciers disappear, then the summer runoff disappears, too. Scientists estimate that within a short 15 years, Quito, the mountain capital of Ecuador, will lose its source of water because of a glacier's disappearance.

Water, in whatever form it takes, is precious, holy even, because it gives us life. It makes us whole.

May the waters we have merged here this morning, whether real or symbolic, continue to sustain this community. May we be one in our commitment to our shared values and our dream of a better, sustainable world where all are able to live. May we always remember water is sacred and limited. May our act of pouring be symbolic of our recommitment to protecting our environment and all that live within it. May it be so.

### **Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

1. What water source (ocean, river, rain, etc) do you feel most connected to and why?
2. Reflect on your experiences this summer and the ways they may have changed you. Which had the greatest impact on you, and why?
3. What are some ways you may take water for granted or show your appreciation of water?