

## **Sermon: Infused with Hope (Laurel)**

I'm a tea drinker by nature - coffee is just too much. That, and I'm stubborn - my family is firmly divided between tea drinkers and coffee drinkers, and I'm not about to change my alliance.

There's also a simple elegance to making tea that I love: hot water infused with tea leaves or herbs, citrus or flower or fruit. All you need is a vessel to hold the infusing and heated water.

There's a kind of alchemical magic that happens in the steeping. Maybe you have a hearty earl gray that will wake you up and get the day started; maybe a chamomile for soothing, a bright cold hibiscus to secretly get you to drink more water, a chai that smells like your grandparents' home.

Water infused is made new into something else altogether, with new properties and new powers, new purpose.

When we gather on this first Sunday of the church year, it is our practice, as it is for many UUs, to have a water communion service. To a Christian ear, this surely sounds confusing, for we are not in fact going to drink the water - I recommend never ever drinking water communion water.

Unlike the Christian liturgical meaning of communion, that of bread and wine, which is meant for creating closeness with a trinitarian God, water communion is about gathering together. 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.

It is our practice to come to this service with water from the places we've been over the summer - maybe a lake or the ocean, a stream in the backwoods or the spigot from a campsite. During the service we pour all of our water samples into one central vessel, as a way of marking our gathering back together. You can see

why I recommend never drinking water communion water.

It's a beautiful ritual, with the danger of turning into a travelogue for the well-traveled. And where we've been while we were away does kind of distract from the point. To be clear, you do not need to have the resources for travel to belong in this place.

So I'd like to go about this differently. Collective ritual is a powerful thing, so let's use it well.

This is the first water communion service we are having together since my very first Sunday here - the last two years we've done what we could on zoom.

So beyond just the start of a new year, this feels like a new beginning, the turning of a new leaf in pretty profound way. This is the beginning of my fourth year as your minister and we have not yet had a whole year here in-person together.

So I want us all to be intentional today, on this ingathering Sunday, about our hope and our vision for this congregation in this new year together.

What are you offering to this infusion? And what alchemy can this community offer not only to you, but to everyone here, to the community outside our walls, to a vision of world building?

Your hope for this community belongs here. Your vision for what and who we can be together belongs here, in this sacred collective.

I'm going to ask our ushers to come around with extra water for anyone who needs it.

Before you come up to add your water to our collective vessel, I want to invite you to reflect on your hopes for this community. Maybe imagine your hope moving from your hands through the cup or container you're holding, swirling through that

water, infusing it until it has been made new, made different. Maybe you want to imagine that your hope has a color, and like tea steeping a new color is blooming into that water.

Kala will play some music while we sit and infuse our water with hope. When you're ready, I invite you to come forward and add your sacred water to our communal water, blending our hopes and our dreams together as we do in this congregation.

(blending of waters)

Now that we have combined all our water together, I'll end with this blessing by the Rev. Ranwa Hammamy:

This water is sacred. It is made sacred by the many hands that have poured it with intention and love, the many stories that each drop contains, the many lives surrounding it in this unique moment, connected by commitment and faith.

This water is sacred. May it continue to flow through this community, with shining reflections of the unique gifts that flow through each of its members.

May it continue to nurture this community, With sustaining hope that we journey together through ripples of growth and change.

May it continue to bless this community with loving reminders of our collective responsibility to one another and the world.

May its ripples be a reminder that the changes and growth within this community bring movement and transformation to the world beyond our doors.

May its purity offer grace to our community, and the willingness to forgive ourselves and one another when we make mistakes.

In moments when we are confused or uncertain, may it bring us clarity of purpose and commitment.

In moments when the reservoirs of hearts and spirits are drained by sorrow or pain, may it nourish them with the knowledge that we are surrounded by a deep and abundant love.

This water is sacred.

Blessed be.