

A Water Celebration Reflection

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<http://firstunitarian.org/assembly-september-10-water-celebration/>

A week ago Friday, on September 1st, my partner and I flew home to Minneapolis after spending five days in South Florida. We had gone there for a late-summer visit, to see two of my lifelong friends and their families. It was hot, as you can imagine Florida in late August might be. So it made sense that our whole trip was one long celebration of water.

We splashed in outdoor swimming pools. We ate freshly caught fish for dinner every night, sometimes right on the shoreline. And we swam and jumped around in the ocean, which was clear and warm and gave us some great waves to play in – big enough for body surfing, but not too big. Water was everywhere we looked, and it stayed in its usual places.

After spending many sunny hours on the peaceful beaches of Florida, we would spend the evenings reading about what was happening to Houston, and about a new storm forming out in the far eastern Atlantic, thousands of miles away. We felt like we were visiting paradise, but we knew that no paradise lasts forever.

When it came time for us to head home, we were sad to be leaving. We had the usual let-down that can happen when a vacation comes to an end. But there was also a deeper sadness, because we didn't know, and we still don't know, what Florida might be like when we go back, or what it will be like for the millions of people who call it home. Water is sustaining and life-giving and beautiful. And water can be the fearsome opposite of all those things.

Friend or enemy, joy or suffering – the roles that water can play in our lives remind us of the challenges of living in these times, the challenges of being human. As David says every week in our closing words, "hold on to what is good." That's one of the big challenges right now, to see and savor and celebrate what is good, when we know that there is so much that's not. To acknowledge both the beautiful and its opposite, to live with the complexities of this world, to focus on the here and now and not on promises of paradise -- this is the hard work of practicing humanism.

It's not easy stuff, even in less extreme times, and it's especially challenging now, with our divisive national leadership, extreme natural disasters magnified by human error

and greed, the terrorizing of immigrants, even threats of nuclear war. It's a lot to be aware of, and to live with, on top of all the personal burdens we each have in our lives.

That's why we gather here. To feel less alone with all that's going through our minds, in a world that may not always understand our theological orientation. We gather here to get support when we need it, and give it to others when we can. To find comfort in familiar ritual, and in a familiar place. To create experiences together, and to learn together. And to pool our collective energy to bring about change to a world that truly needs what we have to offer. We are gifts to each other, and this place we create by coming together is a gift to us and to our world.