

I've always been fascinated by water. I love being by the water and I love walking in the rain, especially after dark on a warm summer night. At the same time, water can frighten me, like when I've been scuba diving 60 feet down. Or when I think about the power of waves and the damage they can do during a big storm.

Water is a funny thing. It takes so many different shapes and comes to us in so many different ways. It can come out of a faucet drop by drop or pour down on us from the sky. It can be a muddy puddle or a clear deep lake. Or it can be ice cold and refreshing or steamy hot for tea. Or like a person in a row boat way out at sea might say, "water, water, everywhere, but not a drop to drink".

Water has long been seen as a symbol of life. Some say all life came from water. Anyone who has spent time in the desert or even ridden their bikes for a long time in hot weather, knows we certainly can't live without water—at least not for very long. Water is an important part of our lives.

This morning during our traditional water ceremony we've been talking about water as a symbol of all of us as individuals and families, choosing to come together to make one Faith community. But now I want to change our focus to a different symbol of coming together. Hang with me here, because I'm about to change gears, from talking about water to talking about the official seal of the United States.

Anyone know what that seal looks like? If you have a quarter, it might be right there. It's also on the back of a dollar bill [but you can't see the part I want to talk about very well].

In 1776, congress asked a committee to come together and design a seal for the United States. That committee came up with an imagine that showed a symbol of the various countries where people in the colonies had come from; England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Holland and Germany---somehow they forgot to include the people who were here before the settlers arrived and the slaves that had been brought here—but that's another story altogether.

Around the images of those 6 countries, they created symbols of the 13 original colonies...should we name them? Mass, NH, Conn, RI, NY, NJ, Penn, Del, Maryland, N. Car, S. Car, Georgia and Virginia. That proposal was rejected and it wasn't until six years later that an official seal was approved by congress.

The central focus of the seal though is an eagle with a banner in it's beak. Written on that banner is the motto of the United States. It says...E Pluribus Unum. It's written in latin. Pluribus is similar to our word plural, meaning more than one. Unum is like our word unit, as in single or one. E Pluribus Unum means, out of many, one.

Out of many states, we formed one Nation. The individual states, or colonies, decided they were better off joining together than staying separate. Now, these different states didn't decide that all needed to be the same in order to come together. They each retained their individual laws and customs but understood they were stronger if they joined into a single, larger whole.

They poured their resources together; their money, their brainpower and their military power. They each contributed to the whole; they brought what they could to strengthen the whole.

The way the states came together was called a democracy. Where each of the states got to be involved with making decisions that affected the whole. Where each of the states agreed to make the good of the Nation as important as the good of their individual and separate states.

This form of government and the agreements they made, to all abide by a constitution and bill of rights, is thought by many to be the best form of government. In fact the United States holds itself up to be the best model of government for all countries. Many would argue with the idea, but many would agree.

I want to suggest to you, that Unitarian Universalism could have as its motto, E Pluribus Unum. And further, I want to suggest that Unitarian Universalism, like the ideal version of democracy, is a very good form of religion, or way to create a faith community.

We come from different places around the country, some even come from different countries. We come from different races, different ethnicities, different genders and sexual orientations. Some of us are tall, and others, not so much. We are different in many ways.

We also come from different belief systems. Some of us grew up as Catholics, some grew up in Jewish households while others were Methodist, Baptist, Lutherans or Presbyterians. Still others grew up with or adopted a pagan worldview. Some of us identify as Humanist and others say they have no religious belief system at all.

Yet, here we are, all together. We have voluntarily chosen to come together. We've agreed to be in a covenantal relationship with each other and with other Unitarian Universalists. Despite our differing belief systems and differing worldviews, we have chosen to be in relationship with one another based on a set of shared values.

We express our shared values in a set of seven principles. These seven principles overlap and when woven together, make a powerful statement about who we are as a people, as a faith community. Our sixth principle, says that we affirm and promote the goal of building a world community, where there is peace, liberty and justice for everyone.

This principle builds on our belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and our belief that we live in an interconnected web of life. That means that tall people and short people, rich people and poor people, believers and non-believers are all connected in a fundamental way. And that each of us is worthy of being treated with dignity.

Because we are human, we are not and can not be perfect. In truth, we are no where near being perfect. We make mistakes, we sometimes behave badly. We often fail to live up to our own promises and expectations. Yet, we are one. And we are stronger and made better in community than when we are alone and separate.

E Pluribus Unum, from many, one. I want to point out there is movement in the concept of that motto; an intentional, voluntary coming together; an intention to be better and stronger as a community. Our Water Ceremony this morning is a symbol of that voluntary coming together.

I wonder what we will do with our togetherness? Like water, we can be a muddy puddle or we can be a big powerful river. We could have the impact of a small drip drop of water, or we could have the impact of a great river, that makes it's own way and has a mission to fulfill.

My bet is you know which option I would choose. And you? What option would you choose?

Amen.