

## **“The Water Communion: On Troubled Waters & Shared Hopes”**

*A Homily by the Rev. Alex Jensen*

*First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto, Canada*

*Sunday, September 13, 2026*

Friends, here we have arrived at the threshold of this exciting moment together! The start of our new ministry; the winding and flowing river of this congregation making new turns and curves as we find our way toward a flow. This new ministry is just one of many in the long, flowing river of this community's over 180 years, of which I am just number 23 of your settled ministers! *Nothing like that for a perspective check.* I am humbled to be stepping into this river with you as we do so together in faith for where this journey will take us.

This community's river has had many iterations over the years. We've had a few different buildings and places where we've gathered and called it “home”. From Jarvis Street to Saint Clair, to these rollercoaster years in the wilderness in between places. Even here, in the wilderness, through times of great upheaval and transition for our community and for our wider world, we managed to find “home” in community halls and auditoriums, arriving to this place, our new home at 473 for over a year now.

Not even just in terms of place, but also people have flowed in and out of our doors over the years. Some newer faces, like mine! Some who come and stay a little while. Others who have found “home” in this river for decades. The great many who have flowed onward in mystery, whose legacies our communal river still carries within its currents. Let's pause to consider the many winding turns of this River; the flow has led here, to this threshold and watershed moment.

As we come together, with our waters now mingled, we bring with us much that we carry into this new year. We are in a season of new beginnings: the start of school and classes; adjusting to new schedules and rhythms. For some of us, starting new jobs; learning to take on new responsibilities as we find our “flow”. Likewise, Earth's natural rhythms, as the Wheel of the Year turns toward Autumn and our days grow milder and the leaves start to change colour... These rhythms remind us that we're ever in a flow of transition and change.

We arrive here at the threshold of new beginnings. Some that have arrived from endings. From pain and loss; from drought and hardship. Not to mention these new happenings in the wider storms of our shared world. Of rising tensions between sibling nations and our flow of trade. (Who ever knew that the name of our beloved Lake Ontario would become so political?)

The seed of this moment brings with it so much uncertainty. The not-knowing of what may come next in our world. As I join in the flow of this community, I notice the place where these streams meet and merge. Together, we bring our enthusiasm and our excitement, just as we also hold our breath and we grit our teeth, facing the precariousness of our shared world. For all of us, at some level, this community itself is a wellspring of hope. A reminder that we're not just aimlessly floating downstream in the river of life. That we do so with one another and with our neighbours who have committed to travel life's journey together.

Religious and spiritual stories often invoke water as a powerful metaphor. From the Hebrew Bible, water is a site of primordial creation; of sheer and utter chaos, as much as it is also a site of blessing. From out of troubled waters flows life and land. Out of this chaos comes birth and new life.<sup>1</sup>

From Anishinaabe traditions, water itself is sacred and living; the fundamental giver of life. As taught by Michi Saagiig Elder Dorothy Taylor of Curve Lake First Nation, Creator's first thought of unconditional love brought forth sacred waters. Waters to sustain us and all things.<sup>2</sup>

Even the Earth's Water Cycle is a spiritual teaching about transformation and change. Water itself will touch many places and take on many different forms. Our minds can scarcely fathom the journeys these droplets have made only to arrive here.

We are in our own season of new pourings and rhythms. We are a community that's brimming with life! As your new minister, I witness the many streams and currents already flowing here amongst us. And, as the "new guy," it's going to take me some time to learn the ropes. To grow in connection with each of you. To learn the ways that I might flow with you. And likewise, how you might flow with me.

There's a certain mystery and sacred alchemy in our forging this new ministry together. I bring great trust in the time of this unfolding and how this current will carry us as we find our "flow state" together. To avoid our being like crashing and competing waves rather than gentle and tranquil streams.

I've learned that this sacred time together is not bad chaos. It's actually *creative* chaos. A chaos that comes from this alchemy of coming together. Now, don't get me wrong. I don't need to tell you that chaos itself is always comfortable... *We know a recent thing or two about chaos, amen?* Chaos itself is sometimes rather uncomfortable. There's a lot we do not and cannot know about who we are mutually becoming and where we're going. Chaos also holds a few surprises in store. Off-ramps and detours toward things unseen.

I want to name it now, so that I don't already disappoint you... The truth is, I won't be a perfect minister. (I hope this isn't a shock...) There will be things I miss or I won't get quite right. Even just things I don't know as a newcomer to this community. *I am a recovering American, after all...* I also ought to tell you that I didn't take those amazing mind-reading classes they offer in seminary. I didn't have room in my class schedule for those, so mind reading isn't something I do very well... Just be forewarned.

Even though I won't be a perfect minister, I covenant to be your minister. To give you my very best. To grow together in this mutual aspiration to live as fully into these Principles and values as we human beings can. This I do promise.

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<sup>1</sup> ["Chaotic Waters"](#), BibleProject.

<sup>2</sup> ["Gichitwaa Nibi - Sacred Waters Water Teaching with Elder Dorothy Taylor"](#), GreenUP, YouTube.

This time of troubled waters is also a site of creation. It is from these waters, poured out and running over, that our community draws so much abundance and life. In this flowing river, we cannot see how things will take shape.

There's a story that comes from the Buddhist tradition: the story of Ananda by the stream.<sup>3</sup> In brief, the Buddha and his disciple are on a journey and stop to rest by a rapidly flowing stream. His disciple Ananda prefers taking water from the gentler river to drink, as the stream has kicked up lots of muck; the water cloudy with mud and grime. Not so fun to drink.

Three times, the Buddha insists that Ananda must bring him water from the stream. After finally sitting by the water and stilling his thoughts, the disciple finds that the water becomes clear. The muck settles to the bottom of the stream. It is only through patience and the willingness to trust in the flow that the water became clear. Water to quench both of their deep thirsts.

With this teaching, I invite you as I also invite myself to actually go with the flow. To sit by our stream for a while. To trust in the process of our stream to bring us closer, to bring us to where we need to be. Rivers and streams themselves take their sweet time in discerning their direction. They have many bends and turns that shift with the years. What might be the same river is *not* the same river. Only in time can the river's authentic flow become both revealed and known.

Friends, this is a special time of learning about one another. Of learning our stories and struggles. Of sharing in the rich work of ministry together. Without getting too sappy, this is also a time of falling in love with each other, as a minister and a congregation. Something that will need to happen in its own proper timing.

Starting a new ministry together is not unlike watering a seed. For things to flow and flourish, they need the right kind of care. This new seed we plant together will be watered by the rivers of connection and commitment. You and I have entered into this sacred partnership in the tending of our communal garden. As we find ourselves at the threshold of this new year. As the storms continue to rage around us. As we hold these droplets of hope renewed right here in our hands... *How will you water this seed?*

We cannot know the richness of the many years ahead. What we do know is that we're at the start of something extraordinary. *The question is: are you along for the ride? Are you ready to "go with the flow"?*

From our many varied sources, we flow into this common spring. As your minister, let me just say this: Come on in! The water is fine.

Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> ["Ananda The Guardian of the Dhamma"](#), by Hellmuth Hecker, *AccessToInsight.org*.