

Water, Water . . . Everywhere?
Sunday, May 22nd

Church of the Advent, Colwood BC

Rev. Ken Gray

POEM (Samuel Taylor Coleridge)

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.

Water, water, every where,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, every where,
Nor any drop to drink.

SCRIPTURE

By the waters of Babylon—
there we sat down and there we wept
when we remembered Zion. (Psalm 137)

“Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” (John 4)

(W)hoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple -- truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward" (Matthew 10:42)

TRUE or FALSE (What's Happening Today?)

- Of the total volume of water on earth, 97% is seawater, 2% is frozen in polar caps, and **1% is underground, in lakes, and in rivers.**
- Today, 230 million people in 26 countries live in scarce water conditions.
- The average resident of the United States uses 70 times more water than a person in Ghana.

STATEMENTS

ONE In 1966, the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights established **the right to water as a human right.**

TWO In 1999, the **Dublin Conference on Water and the Environment** established four principles that have subsequently guided world water policy:

- (1) fresh water is a **finite and vulnerable** resource;
- (2) water development and management should be based on a **participatory approach**, involving users, planners and policy makers at all levels;
- (3) **women play a central role** in the provision, management, and safeguarding of water;
- (4) water has an economic value in all its **competing uses** and should be recognized as an economic good.

THREE In 2001, 800 delegates from 35 countries attended the **Water for Peace and Nature Summit in Vancouver**. They endorsed and signed the "Treaty Initiative To Share and Protect the Global Water Commons," which includes the following:

"We proclaim these truths to be universal and indivisible:

That **the intrinsic value of the Earth's fresh water precedes its utility and commercial value**, and therefore must be respected and safeguarded by all political, commercial, and social institutions;

That the **Earth's water belongs to the Earth and all species**, and therefore must be not be treated as a private commodity to be bought, sold, and traded for profit;

That the **global fresh water supply is a shared legacy**, a public trust, and a fundamental human right, and therefore, a collective responsibility."

REALITY CHECK

1.1 billion people worldwide lack access to clean water. 1.8 million children die each year from waterborne diseases -- one every 10 seconds. 5.3 billion people, **two thirds of the world's population, will suffer from water shortages by 2050.**

IN OUR OWN BACK YARD - THE SALISH SEA

Briony Penn with assistance by Michelle McDonald

The biggest threats facing the Salish Sea and the archipelago of islands are the increasing human pressures around and within the islands. Few people realize that it is **an inland sea with a slow circulation**, and that their individual actions have an effect upon life forms living in and around this sea. From leaking septic tanks to clearing of forests for views or pulp, people are killing the Salish Sea.

What I hoped to do with this installation was create a bold symbol of the threats that urbanization poses to the sensitive ecosystems of the Salish Sea - a toilet.

This idea was inspired by a 15th century Flemish masterpiece by Hans Memling called The Voyage of Saint Ursula's Relics. In the same shape as a water tank, Memling's piece depicts the sacred relics of Saint Ursula with scenes of her sainthood painted around it.

In our piece, by putting artistic importance on relics of species and ecosystems rather than saints, we are highlighting the essential sanctity of the biological diversity of the region. We (as artists) are asking the question: have we (as people) lost our sense of sanctity for the natural world, and is that the problem? Do we put cleanliness, convenience - even ocean views - before life itself?

SO WHERE'S THE HOLINESS NOW? WHY ARE WE IN SUCH A MESS?

One Canadian water company, Global Water Corp., puts it best: **Water has moved from being an endless commodity that may be taken for granted to a rationed necessity that may be taken by force."**

While it is obviously true that we need water for basic survival, **recent attempts to categorize water as a "need," rather than a "right" have been legal attempts to justify privatization --** that is to say, companies claim that their mission is to fulfill this basic "need." This is misleading at best.

The issues of privatization, the large-scale ownership of water, and more broadly, water as "an economic good," have for some time been highly contentious subjects on the international scene. **Private industry has tremendous resources which can help solve the water crisis. However, the solutions we seek must be understood in humanitarian, ecological, spiritual, as well as economic contexts.**

It is no secret that a large part of the crisis we have entered is a result of the **rejection of sustainability, equity, the universality of human rights, and the common good by powerful economic interests who favor competition to decide who will win and lose in wars for dwindling resources.**

Water is the most basic constituent of life. **70% of the human body is composed of water, and it is found in the earth in an equal proportion. Without water, the web of life would not exist.** Water is a natural right -- it should not be owned, privatized, bought or sold. **The stewardship of water is a sacred trust and responsibility that we all share.**

What the Churches Can Do

*** Church leaders, lay and ordained, must speak directly to government representatives on all levels -- local, regional, and national -- about the right to safe, clean water and preserving that right as a basic public trust.**

*** Use the water in your baptismal font both as a sacrament and as an educational tool** linking spiritual teachings, environmental stewardship, and basic human rights.

* **Invite women in your congregation to share their experience about the significance of water**, its uses, and the issues surrounding it.

* Visit nearby watersheds with your congregations and communities to **bless the water**.

* Implement **water conservation strategies** in your parish church or other places of worship.

POSTLUDE

Water symbolizes the possibility of rebirth, empowerment, and the hope of a renewed creation. Water is a primordial manifestation of the sacred on earth. The sacred is about survival -- real survival for the whole body of life, which is the reason religious traditions, especially those of indigenous peoples, have valued it so highly.

The substance of water itself, the natural design of watersheds, the ocean currents, and the cycles of rainfall express this spiritual meaning through their ecological properties of cleansing and healing the planet as a whole.