

August 21, 2016 Element: Water

Vicki and I had the opportunity to spend most of our vacation time in, on or beside various bodies of water. It was wonderful and informative as we continue our exploration of the elements. It's no secret, today's element is water. Water is traditionally associated with the direction of the west and the season of autumn. These represent the transition into darkness, dormancy and the unconscious. Human life itself begins in a dark watery womb. We spend our first 9 months of life in water and then emerge from this warm, dark brine into the bright busy world. The waters break open when birth is impending.

In the first Creation story in Genesis, water existed before the light; and out of the dark waters of chaos **God's** creation emerged. It reminds us that water is essential, foundational to life. Water pulses through our veins and arteries making up between 70% and 80% of our bodies. The beating of our blood echoes the great rhythms of the ocean tides, the ebb and flow of the seas daily cycle that reflect the moon's phases. There is a wonderful symmetry here that points to the rhythm and connectedness of all things.

Interestingly 70% of the earth's surface is also water and our search for life on other planets focuses on the presence of water in some form. Water is unique in its properties, appearing in different states—steam, liquid and ice within a relatively narrow temperature range. Water alone expands when it freezes and freezes from the surface unlike all other liquids. Water can be pressurized to more than four atmospheres within plants allowing seedlings to break through asphalt in tacked. Without these anomalies there could be no life as we know it.

Water always seeks a level and will flow and trickle and seep into any space or permeable substance on route to reaching that level. It reminds us of how **God** is present in all things and all things are present in **God**.

The most recent scientific investigations suggest that water has an internal structure collecting its molecules in a repeating pattern that replicates and repairs itself while on a fluid state, trapping and transferring energy, information and even emotions over time in amazing and unexpected ways. You may remember the amazing crystalized images of water subjected to human emotions some twenty years ago that spawned this research.

We encounter water in many different configurations—oceans, lakes, rivers, rain, pools, puddles, dew and tears. For ancient peoples, the sea was a place of great mystery, fearful creatures and unending horizons packed with religious import. Water is also a dominant symbol in religious practice. Ritual bathing and hand washing for purification have a place in many traditions. Buddhism connects water to prayer and always has a bowl of water featured in prayer ceremonies. In Christianity water is featured in the font at Baptism. Symbolically we pass through the waters of chaos into new life in Christ.

John O'Donohue writes in one of his poems about the desire to live like a river, "*carried by the surprise of its own unfolding*". Embracing the gift of water invites us into a way of becoming that asks us to hold less tightly to our carefully constructed plans. It offers us the fluidity of listening and responding to a movement in a given moment, of living our way into the Mystery in the midst of life. Water beckons us into the sacred flow of life. We are asked to pour ourselves out for others, trusting that we will be refilled: Ebb and flow, flow and ebb.

Here are some suggestions, some ways we can get in touch with the Element of Water.

Walk in the rain.

Sit and watch a park fountain or bird bath.

Go swimming or sailing.

Run through a sprinkler with the kids or without.

Give thanks for the gift of water as you shower or wash your hands.

Support those who have limited access to water through nonprofit organizations.

Water Prayer

Spirit of Living Water,

You hold all of creation and bring us to birth
through the flow of water.

Spirit who moves within the Tides of the oceans and the tides of our lives,
remind us of the rise and fall of your rhythms
so we might discover them deep within ourselves.

Spirit in the falling rain, bringing moisture to the waiting earth,
bring moistness to our lives, and quench our thirst
so that we might be revived by your refreshing presence.

Spirit flowing in running rivers and lapping waves,
flow through us to the wider world
so that we might share the blessing of your life-giving waters.

We pray for all creatures where rivers and lakes have dried up,
and where places are floating due to floods.

We pray for those who thirst for fresh, clean water...

for those who thirst for the water of friendship and belong.

We pray for those who thirst for peace...
We pray for those who thirst for love...
We pray for those who thirst for safety...
In particular we pray for one or two loved ones
that they might get back into the healing,
renewing flow of life and be restored in the living water of Jesus.
Thank you, Spirit of Living Water. Amen.

11

When it comes to the Summer Olympics there are a lot of water sports.
At the pool there is springboard, and tower, individual and synchronized
diving.
There are all the various swimming stroke events, varying lengths, medleys
and relays: 38 swim events in all.
There is synchronized swimming and water polo.
 Outdoors we have marathon swimming.
Next we have canoeing, kayaking, and rowing; singles, doubles, fours and in
rowing eights.
Then there are 7 different sailboat classes.
We will have to wait until the next Olympics for surfing.
Where water is only one part of their discipline we have triathlon, modern
pentathlon and equestrian eventing.
In the river there is slalom canoeing, singles and doubles and singles
kayaking.
 Of course almost every event is contested in both men's and women's
streams, so the number of water events at the Summer Olympics is
significant, over 80 of them.

In the Winter Olympics all events involve snow or ice which of course is water by another name.

Water features prominently at the Olympics. It also figures prominently in the Gospels.

The action in John's gospel begins with his baptizing activities as the Jordan River. **Jesus** immediately shows up to be baptized by John.

Three days later Jesus turns over 120 gallons of water into wine at the wedding at Cana.

Next **Jesus** goes to Jerusalem and Nicodemus comes to **Jesus** by night.

Jesus tells him that no one can enter the kingdom of **God** without being born of water and Spirit.

Then **Jesus** is accused of baptizing more followers than John, so he leaves Judea and travels back to Galilee. But on the way in Samaria he stops at Jacob's well in the heat of the day and encounters a woman there. He asks for water and then offers himself to her as the living water.

After returning to Galilee and healing an official's son, **Jesus** returns to Jerusalem and heals a man at the pool of Bethesda.

He gets into a dispute with the authorities and then goes back up to the far side of the Sea of Galilee. There he feeds the multitude with five loaves and two fish.

Then he sends the disciples to cross the sea by night. A storm blows up, **Jesus** comes walking on the water, stills the storm and they all reach the other side safe and sound.

Next **Jesus** goes back to Jerusalem again for the festival of Tabernacles. He teaches and disputes at the Temple and on the last day of the festival he declares ***“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Rivers of living water will pour out of them.”***

Have you had enough? We get the message that water figures significantly in **Jesus'** ministry. Add to this that Palestine was an arid land, so water though scarce was even more focused in people's minds.

Now it has been too easy in the past to interpret our gospel lessons as only referring to spiritual water. With all that we are discovering about the mystery of water and its unique properties that alone make life possible, maybe it is time to take **Jesus'** words more fluidly.

Jesus didn't say spiritual water; he said water and spirit to Nicodemus. He twins water with spirit placing the two on equal footing. Being born of water and spirit can just as easily be translated a being born of water and wind. **Jesus** could have been speaking about more than baptism in this. Remember in Genesis we are born of water and the wind over the water. **Jesus** is inviting us to see in water the very nature and mystery of **God**.

At Jacobs well **Jesus** is saying he is more than ancestor Jacob who only dug the well. Jesus is the life giving water of the well. In fact **Jesus** offers himself to the 'woman at the well' as **God's** living water. The life renewing nature of **God** is living water, just as water is itself living, interacting and life giving.

When we begin to drink in that **God** is as necessary to life as is water, what **God** and water together are at the heart of life itself, we are drawing from the well of everlasting life.

Finally **Jesus** blurts out on the last day of the festival of Tabernacles ***“Come to me all you faithful souls who thirst and I will give you drink. And what's more, you to will become rivers of living water, spilling out to bless all life.”***

Living waters release even more living water. Living water releases all life as we know it, in cascading outpourings.

The bold promise is that we who thirst after living water become such a blessing, as we drink from the life of **Jesus** and become what is needed for our world.

Application for Today

It's time to understand the mystery of **God** in the amazing aspects of water and treat each as a revelation of the other. It will refresh your life.