

## **February 15 – Going with the Flow – inspired by Sue Heatherington**

### **Sermon: “Going with the Flow: Water as a Metaphor for Life” by Dianne M. Daniels**

Water teaches us something essential about life, if we’re willing to pay attention.

Not the dramatic moments first — not the crashing waves or the violent storms — but the quieter truths.

The slow movement. The steady presence.

The way water shows up, again and again, without asking permission.

The way it adapts to whatever shape it finds itself in, without losing its essence.

Religious educator Sue Heatherington invites us to see water as a metaphor for life itself — not as something static or fixed, but as something living, moving, relational. Water doesn’t insist on one form. It flows. It pools. It freezes. It evaporates. It returns. And through all of that change, it remains water.

That matters for us — especially now. Many of us were taught that strength equates to stiffness.

That faith looks like certainty.

That integrity means never changing our minds.

But water tells a different story.

Water teaches us that real strength is flexible. That endurance doesn’t require hardness. That faithfulness to our values does not mean rigidity of form.

And that message feels especially important on a weekend shaped by love — not the Hallmark version, but the deeper kind. The kind of love our Unitarian Universalist faith places at the center of everything.

A love that is resilient. A love that adapts.

A love that keeps moving toward justice, even when the path is winding and difficult.

## **What Is: Learning from Water**

Water is one of the few substances that becomes stronger through movement.

A river doesn't carve stone by force. It does so through persistence. Through showing up every day. Through adjusting to the land rather than trying to dominate it.

Left alone, water will always find the lowest point — not because it is weak, but because it understands gravity. It understands reality. It understands how the world actually works.

That's not passivity.  
That's intelligence.

We sometimes mistake loudness for power and stillness for surrender. But water reminds us that there is a kind of strength that doesn't announce itself — a strength that works quietly, patiently, over time.

Think about the strength required to keep going when no one is applauding. The strength required to stay tender in a world that rewards hardness. The strength required to remain open when closing off would feel safer.

Water doesn't harden itself to survive. It stays fluid.

And when it can't move forward, it doesn't give up — it changes state.

This is where water begins to sound like faith.

Not faith as dogma or doctrine, but faith as trust — trust in life, trust in ourselves, trust in the wisdom that lives beneath our fear. Faith that says: I may not know exactly how this will unfold, but I know who I am. I know what I value. And I know I can keep moving.

### **So What: Strength, Flexibility, and Integrity**

Here's where water challenges us — and maybe corrects us a little. Many of us were raised to believe that integrity means standing firm at all costs. That once we choose a value, we must express it the same way **forever**. That changing our approach means compromising our principles.

But water shows us something more nuanced — and more faithful.

Integrity is not rigidity.

Integrity is alignment.

It's the ability to adapt our actions without abandoning our values.

Water doesn't stop being water when it flows around a rock.

It doesn't lose its nature when it freezes for a season.

It doesn't betray itself when it evaporates and returns as rain.

It remains true to itself because it can change.

That's a powerful spiritual truth.

In our lives, flexibility often looks like:

- Learning new ways to communicate when old ones no longer land
- Adjusting expectations as circumstances change
- Letting go of strategies that once served us but now restrict us

None of that means we've lost our moral compass. It means we're using it wisely.

This is where interdependence enters the picture. Water never exists in isolation. It is shaped by its surroundings — by land, by temperature, by gravity, by time. And in turn, it shapes everything it touches.

So do we.

Our strength does not come from standing alone. It comes from knowing when to lean, when to yield, when to rest, and when to move forward together.

Some of the strongest people I know are not the loudest. They are not the most certain. They are the ones who have learned how to listen — to their inner lives, to their communities, to the quiet signals of their own bodies and spirits. They understand that wisdom doesn't always shout. Sometimes it flows.

## **Transformation: Change Without Losing Yourself**

Transformation is not about becoming someone else. It's about becoming more fully who you already are.

Water teaches this beautifully. Over time, water transforms landscapes — not by force, but by presence. By consistency. By responding to what is actually there.

We often fear transformation because we associate it with loss — loss of identity, loss of certainty, loss of control.

But transformation, at its best, is not erasure. It is refinement. It's the process of learning how to move through the world with greater honesty, greater compassion, and greater self-trust.

When we learn to trust ourselves — our instincts, our emotions, our lived experience — we stop trying to be someone we're not. We stop performing strength and start practicing it.

That kind of strength looks like:

- Saying “no” when everything in you has been trained to say “yes.”
- Asking for help without apology
- Allowing grief, doubt, or fear to pass through rather than calcify

Water doesn't resist every obstacle. It responds.

That response is not random — it is informed by intelligence, memory, and relationship. So is ours.

## **Love at the Center**

At the center of all of this — strength, flexibility, transformation — is love. Not love as sentiment, but love as daily, challenging, intentional practice.

The kind of love that shows up even when it's inconvenient.  
The kind of love that stays curious instead of defensive.  
The kind of love that bends rather than breaks.

In our Unitarian Universalist faith, love is not something we merely feel — it is something we do.

We practice love when we:

- Adapt our methods to serve our values more effectively
- Staying in relationship, even when disagreement arises
- Choose compassion over certainty

Love does not require us to be unchanging; it requires us to be faithful.

- Faithful to our values.
- Faithful to one another.
- Faithful to the ongoing work of becoming more just, more generous, more humane.

And sometimes, the most loving thing we can do is change our approach — not because we were wrong before, but because the world has shifted, and we are paying attention.

## **Now What: Living Like Water**

So what might it look like to live as if water were our teacher?

- It might look like trusting that you don't have to harden yourself to survive.
- It might look like giving yourself permission to adapt without shame.

- It might look like honoring your values while remaining open to new expressions of them.

Ask yourself:

- Where in my life am I being asked to bend, not break?
- Where am I confusing rigidity with integrity?
- What would it mean to trust my own inner wisdom a little more fully?

Living like water means staying connected — to ourselves, to one another, to the larger flow of life. It means remembering that strength does not always announce itself. Sometimes it simply keeps going.

And in a world that often rewards hardness, choosing fluidity is a spiritual act.

Choosing flexibility rooted in love is an act of faith.  
Choosing transformation without losing yourself is an act of courage.

Water doesn't rush.  
It doesn't panic.  
It doesn't abandon its nature to prove its worth.

It trusts the process.

May we do the same.  
May we be strong enough to stay soft.  
Wise enough to stay flexible.  
Grounded enough to change without losing ourselves.

And may love — steady, persistent, and life-giving — continue to flow through us, shaping who we are and who we are becoming.

Amen.

## **Closing Blessing**

As we go from this place,  
May we remember that strength does not require hardness,  
And faith does not demand rigidity.

May we learn from water —  
to move with intention,  
to adapt without losing ourselves,  
and to trust the quiet wisdom that guides us forward.

May love remain our center,  
Interdependence, our grounding,  
and transformation, our ongoing invitation.

And as we step back into the currents of our lives,  
may we be strong enough to stay soft,  
wise enough to stay flexible,  
and courageous enough to keep flowing toward what matters  
most.

Amen, Ase, Blessed Be, and thank you for your time and  
attention.