

## THE STREAM AND THE DESERT: A PARABLE

by Rev. Kit Ketcham

Sept. 7, 2008

Good morning! Just think, we can say that every Sunday from now on! We don't need to worry about saying "afternoon" when we have our services, we don't need to avoid songs like "Morning Has Broken" and only sing songs about "Day is Done". We can keep the chairs in the order we want them; we don't have to take down Trinity's sacred symbols and put up our own. This is OUR HOUSE! Isn't it lovely?

I want to add my own appreciation to the recognitions that Baird has offered this morning and say that there is no way we can adequately say thank you to the many men and women who have contributed the hours and days and months and years of their lives to our new home.

We are planning a bigger expression of thanks and recognition a little later on in the church year but did not want to wait another moment to recognize the many people who have worked to bring this building to completion.

Many hours of work still lie ahead because for the next several weeks, we will be learning how to use the building best, where to place our sacred symbols, how to accommodate all the new ideas and projects that want to be expressed. It will feel a bit like camping out for awhile.

We plan a Grand Opening Day on October 19, to which we hope to invite the larger community. And after the first of the year, we hope to have a Building Dedication ceremony to which we will invite all the ministers and members of other congregations, as well as district and local dignitaries, to join us in celebrating what this new building means to us and to the

community of Whidbey Island. We hope that the president of the UUA, the Rev. Bill Sinkford, will be able to be our speaker!

So stay tuned! We are entering an exciting time of our lives, after a long period of working and thinking and planning and hoping and dreaming, after many obstacles and many challenges. We have surmounted most of them and expect to be able to manage the rest together. We are tired but we are also exhilarated.

I'd like to tell you a story, a story about a stream and a desert. This is a Sufi story that I like and that I have adapted from a couple of different versions that I've heard. And I think it has a message for us today, on the day when we pool the waters of our lives.

High on a far off mountain, a little spring flowed out of a hidden source. As the water from the spring flowed down the mountain, it passed through all kinds of places, rocky ravines, quiet meadows, past beaver dams and through lakes and ponds.

Sometimes the little stream leaped and danced and bubbled as it raced down a canyon or sometimes it drifted lazily through a forest meadow or even disappeared underground for a short distance. It had never encountered an obstacle that it couldn't surmount, either by leaping over it or going under it or around it or wearing away the hard rock that captured it.

But one day it reached the edge of a vast desert. "Hey, no problem," said the little stream to itself. "I've never been stopped by any obstacle before. No desert is going to stop me now!"

So the stream flung itself at the desert. And its waters disappeared, absorbed by the sand. It threw itself at the hot desert sand again and again. And every time, its waters disappeared.

"This can't be," said the stream. "If the wind can cross the desert, certainly I, a stream, can cross it too!" And it continued to fling itself at the hot sand. And every time, its waters disappeared.

"But it is my destiny to cross the desert," cried the stream, in despair. And as it rested dejectedly at the edge of the desert, getting its strength back, and wondering what to do next, it heard a small, still, whispery voice. And this is what the stream heard the desert say.

"You can't cross the desert using your old ways," said the desert. "I am not like a boulder or a tree or a rocky ledge. It is no use hurling yourself at the desert like that. You will never cross the sand this way; you will simply disappear or turn into marshland."

"But how I can get across?" cried the stream. "I don't know any new ways; I only know the old ways. The wind can get across the desert. Why can't I?"

"The wind is your new way," said the desert. "You must let the wind carry you across the hot sands."

"How can that be?" asked the stream. "How can the wind carry me?"

"You must let yourself be absorbed into the wind," said the desert.

"The wind will catch you up in that way and carry you across the desert."

"No!" cried the stream. "I am a stream with a nature and an identity all my own. I don't want to lose myself by being absorbed into the wind."

"But that's what the wind does," said the desert. "The wind will catch you up and carry you across the desert and set you down again very lightly so you can become a stream again. Trust me and trust the wind."

"But I might not be the same stream on the other side of the desert, if I've been absorbed by the wind and carried a long way. I won't be myself if I let the wind carry me and set me down again in a new place."

The desert understood the stream's fear but it also understood the mystery.

"You're right," said the desert. "But you won't be the same stream, no matter what. If you stay here, you will turn into a marshland and that's not a stream either. If you let the wind carry you across the desert, the real you, the real heart of you, the essence of everything you truly are, will arise again on the other side to flow in a new course, to be a river that you can't even imagine from where you are standing now."

"How can this happen?" asked the stream, mystified by this new idea.

"The wind has always done this," said the desert. "It takes up the water and carries it over the desert and then lets it fall again. The water falls as rain and it becomes a river, joined by waters from all over the world which have crossed the deserts to come together."

"But can't I just stay the same?" asked the stream.

"You cannot in any way remain the same," whispered the desert. "Movement is your very nature. It will never cease until your true destination has been reached."

As the stream considered this, it began to remember where it had come from and it had a memory deep in its heart of a wind that could be trusted and a horizon that was always out of reach but always a new beginning.

So the stream took a deep breath and surrendered itself to the power of the wind and the wind took the vapor of the stream in strong and loving arms and took it high above the desert, far beyond the horizon, and let it fall again softly at the top of a new mountain.

And the stream began to understand who it really was and what it meant to be a stream. (Adapted from versions by All Souls UU in Washington DC and Leonard Ingram)

What does this story say to us as individual human beings?

Like the stream, movement is our very nature. We change every day, sometimes in big ways, sometimes in very small ways, but our essential humanity remains constant. One day we are children, the next it seems we are adults, we are lovers, we are parents and friends and grandparents. Yet no matter what the form of our days may be, our essence is steady.

If we do not let ourselves be transformed by the winds of life, we become stagnant. So, with great fear and yet great courage, we let life lift us, shape us, purify us, help us become who we really are.

And what does this story say to us as a congregation, a faith community of individuals who gather around this chalice, this water, these ideals?

We have been a tiny stream, having fun together, doing what we can to support each other and serve our community, but we came to the edge of a desert one day, needing to move on and not knowing quite how. Finally we took a leap of faith, trusting that our hope and love would carry us across the desert and set us down transformed into a new, larger river of life.

It's been a risky business, this leap of faith. And in the process, whether we wanted to or not, we as individuals have experienced transformation. And we as a congregation have also experienced transformation, leaving our outgrown ways behind us and learning to be a new kind of congregation with more to offer, more people to welcome into our midst, more of everything.

Those of you who are checking us out, who might consider joining us, who are interested in what these crazy Unitarian Universalists are up to back here in the woods---be forewarned. Joining this newly transformed congregation might transform your life.

Because it surely has transformed ours. We have been a small stream, doing what we can with what we have, pooling our lives, our experiences, our wisdom, our creativity, over the past many years. It was scary to trust the wind of our love and our commitment to our ideals and let ourselves be lifted by that wind into a new place, a new home.

As we rode the wind, we learned all kinds of things about ourselves. We learned that fear of change is very real and must be recognized and soothed. We learned that we have the resources to take on a huge project like this and complete it. We learned how to use the chop saw and the hammer and the paintbrush, skills many of us had never thought we might need to have!

As we rode the wind, we began to see each other in a different light. We saw that some of us had magnificent organization skills, that some of us knew how to raise the money we'd need, that some of us actually knew how to build a house, that some of us knew how to work with county officials and contractors, that some of us didn't know how to do anything but be cheerleaders but were ready to learn! Each of us has learned something new during this wild ride.

Our ride on the winds of love and commitment has changed us. We stand here on the other side of the desert, a new stream formed by the winds of change. As we explore this new world, we are eager to learn who you are and what your lives are like. We want to offer you some of what we've learned because of our transformation. We want to share our lives with you

and give you the opportunity, the great daring challenge of being transformed by your place in this community.

For we are not through with our transformation. We may encounter other deserts. But now we know how to trust the wind.

Let's pause for a time of silent reflection and prayer.

BENEDICTION: Our worship service, our time of shaping worth together, is ended, but our service to the world begins again as we leave this place. Let us go in peace, remembering to trust the winds of change, for they have brought us to this new home. May we welcome always the challenges of our new life together and approach them in our common human spirit of love and commitment. Amen, Shalom, Salaam, and Blessed Be.