

# What does water mean to you?

Water means different things to different people. In agriculture, industry and energy generation, water can mean security, productivity and sustainability. Join the #WorldWaterDay conversation.



2021 Valuing water

[www.worldwaterday.org](http://www.worldwaterday.org)

# A SERVICE FOR WORLD WATER DAY

## Opening Prayer

Lord God,

in the imagery of water, you reveal the attributes of your Spirit.

Deepen in us a due respect for this resource

that we may fully drink of the gift of your life-giving Spirit  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

## Gathering

Place bowls of water around the altar and this prayer may be said.

Spirit of Living Water

You hold all of creation in your womb

And spring us forward onto the earth at birth.

Spirit of Tides,

Remind me of the rise and fall of your rhythms

So that I may discover them deep within my own being.

Spirit of Greenness,

Bring moistness and vigour to my life

So that I might savour the experience of your energy

Moving through me out into the world.

Blessings of water be upon me.

May I be carried by the flow of the great river of life.

May I discover a hidden spring within, gushing forth.

May I be carried to the shores of the sacred and renewed.<sup>i</sup>

## Opening responses

Leader Creator God, how great you are!  
You clothe yourself in light  
You stretch out the skies like a tent.

All *Winds are your messengers.*  
*Flames are your servants.*  
*You water the earth until it gives us food.*

Leader How abundant are your works, O God.  
In wisdom have you made them all.

All *The creatures teeming the earth,*  
*The sea, vast and wide –*  
*innumerable things, small and great, live within it –*  
*all these look to you for their food in due season.*  
*When you send forth your Spirit they are created, and you renew the*  
*face of the earth.*

Leader May your glory last for ever.  
May you always have joy in what you have created.

All *May our thoughts always give you pleasure.*

*May we always rejoice in you.*<sup>ii</sup>

## Penitence

God of mercy, we come before you seeking forgiveness because we know how much we have failed you. You created a world of beauty; you gave your people paradise. But we have not been good stewards of the earth we inherited. The rivers are polluted; the air in our cities is made impure; forests are felled and fertile land turned to desert; wild animals are hunted and, for pride and greed, whole species are endangered.<sup>iii</sup>

## After the absolution

Come, all who yearn for forgiveness.  
The Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ has washed over us,  
And our Gracious and Holy God beckons and blesses us.  
Drink deeply of these living waters.  
Glory to you, O Lord, glory to you.

Holy Spirit, Spirit of the Living God  
You breathe in us,  
On all that is inadequate and fragile

You make living water spring even  
From our hurts themselves.  
And through you, the valley of tears  
Becomes a place of wellsprings

So in an inner life  
With neither beginning nor end  
Your continual presence  
Makes new freshness break through.  
*Brother Roger of Taizè*

Sermon notes follow in the next section

## Affirmation of faith

We believe that God creates all things,  
renews all things, and celebrates all things.

We believe Earth is a sanctuary,  
a sacred planet filled with God's presence,  
a home for us to share with all creatures.  
We believe every creature joins us in praising God.  
We see many suffer with Earth  
because of human crimes against creation.

We believe that God became incarnate  
as a part of Earth, Jesus Christ,  
that he lived and breathed and spoke among us,  
suffered and died on a cross,  
for all human beings and for all creation.

We believe that the risen Jesus Christ  
fills the whole creation,  
reconciling all things to God,

renewing all things.

We believe the Spirit renews life in creation,  
groans in empathy with every suffering creature,  
and waits with us for the rebirth of the whole creation.

We believe that with Christ we will rise  
and with Christ we will celebrate a new creation,  
reconciled, restored, and renewed.

## **Intercessions**

God, you send rains in season.  
Send more rain to our parched thirsty lands.  
We ask you for rain.  
We trust in you. You created the world to need the waters of life.  
You are the source of rain.  
Let the rain of your blessing fall.

God, we thank you too for filling us with the water of life  
May we drink deeply that our thirst may be quenched  
May your river continue to flow over us, in us, through us  
and out into the world you love  
In Jesus name. Amen. <sup>iv</sup>

## **Creative responses**

Video link "Nature speaks to us- water" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwV90YeGN88>

## **Peace sentence**

Deep Peace of the running wave to you,  
of water flowing, rising and falling,  
Sometimes advancing, sometimes receding...  
May the stream of life flow unimpeded!  
Deep peace of the running wave to you!<sup>v</sup>

## **Communion**

### **Taking of Bread, Wine and Water**

Often the congregation do not see that water is added to the wine. The three elements are here received and the water poured into the wine in front of the congregation to emphasize the sacredness of the gift of wine.

**The taking of the bread** (as usual)

**The taking of the wine** (as usual)

### **The taking of the water**

Blessed are you, Creator Spirit, Source of all life. Through your goodness we have this water to offer, which refreshes, cleanses and gives life to all your creatures. For us it becomes the water of life.

***Blessed be God forever***

Play river or ocean sounds as people come for communion. You can download them from this link:

<http://soundbible.com/tags-ocean.html>

### Commissioning and blessing

The people can be commissioned and sprinkled with blessed water

### Blessing of the water

You are our God, who through water and Spirit renewed our nature made old by sin.

You are our God, who in the days of Noah drowned sin through the water of the flood.

You are our God, who through Moses freed the Hebrew people from the slavery of Pharaoh through the sea.

You are our God who split open the rock in the desert, and waters rushed out and torrents flooded down, and you satisfied your thirsty people.

And now, Creator God, sanctify this water by your Holy Spirit.

Give to all who are touched by it sanctification, blessing, cleansing, health.

*The congregation is sprinkled*

(Orthodox Church blessing)

Closing video clip – deep peace of the running wave to you

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I6PQRXXn9>

## SERMON

### WATER DISCIPLESHIP

*“This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord.*

*“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.*

*I will be their God, and they will be my people. Jeremiah 31:33*

### SUGGESTED READINGS

Ezekiel 47: 1-12 The rivers are full of teeming life, but the salty areas do not produce life

Psalms 65 Water is part of the great blessing that God brings to the Earth

Revelation 22: 1-5 A vision of a restored Eden, and the healing waters of God

John 4:4-15 Jesus offers the Samaritan woman the waters of everlasting life.

Today on World Water day we celebrate this beautiful blue planet. Planet Earth should really be called Planet ‘Ocean’ as about 71 percent of the Earth’s surface is water-covered, and the oceans hold about 96.5 percent of all Earth’s water. Water also exists in the air as water vapor, in rivers and lakes, in icecaps and glaciers, in the ground as soil moisture and in aquifers.

Yet we have little understanding of water. Although it is mentioned 722 times in the Bible, we rarely hear a sermon about it. Although we become members of the family of God through the sacred waters of Baptism, we treat it as a commodity with little value. Water should be our sacred element, treasured and protected. And yet we still see it as something that “comes out of a tap” from the municipality, we waste it, we pollute it – someone else will clean it up.

Baba Dioum, a Senegalese ecologist said, “In the end we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand; and we will understand only what we are taught”.

The reality is that we need to learn about the water systems of the area we call home. Southern Africa is water scarce. The South African rainfall is just over half of the world average with a high variety of rain fall in different areas. We have summer rainfall areas and winter rainfall areas.

South Africa is classified as a water-scarce country. We need to live with water scarcity as a norm, we can celebrate when there is abundance, but we cannot depend upon it. Today on World Water Day let us look at the city in which we live in a new way – in terms of one united water catchment area – the rain that falls and flows through our city is limited and precious. The rivers flow through communities of rich and poor, the aquifer unites us under our feet. My neighbours live downstream of my rubbish.

When we look at our cities, we see some citizens who live ‘Day Zero’ every day, collecting water from standpipes and carrying it back to their homes. It is said that you only know the value of water when you have to carry it. A filthy communal toilet is shared by many people and is unsafe to use at night for fear of getting harassed or raped. Within the same city are other families watering vast lawns with irrigation systems, filling up large swimming pools and with more bathrooms than people.

Access to water reveals the great injustices across our cities. When we see water as a precious gift from God for the whole community to share, we can see both social and water injustice. We are disconnected both from our neighbour and from our joint sources of water.

When water is scarce, the response of the municipality tends to be punitive – to fine the higher user. During the drought, neighbours were encouraged to report on others. Stories emerged of people watering their gardens by night or topping up swimming pools on the sly.

In our reading today God says

*“I will put my law in their minds  
and write it on their hearts.*

*I will be their God,  
and they will be my people. Jeremiah 31:33*

What does it mean to be God’s people in the way that we treat water and our neighbours?

Do you know that the water we drink now is the same water that was around in Jesus’ time? Do you remember back in school when we learned about the Hydrological cycle? The water in oceans, rivers and the soil is heated by the sun and evaporates, turning into water vapour. The water vapour forms clouds. As they cool down, they form back into water droplets and we get precipitation which is rain, or snow falling down. This rain flows again into oceans, rivers, lakes. Most of it will soak into the ground and collect as underground water. No new water is being produced it is the same water through the ages.

As water disciples we need to protect God’s water. We need to see the whole city as one catchment area – there is enough for our need, but not enough for our greed. As followers of Christ, we need to reduce our water consumption for the love of neighbour, not for fear of being ratted out on social media.

In addition to our surface water dams, we depend greatly on groundwater, otherwise all our plants and vegetables would die. The upper layer of the saturated earth is called the water table. Deeper down is the aquifer, which is a huge storehouse of water filling up porous spaces between the rocks below the water table.

Wells or boreholes can be drilled into the aquifer. When we use that water, the level of the water lowers. It is refilled by rainwater, but if more is pumped out than is recharged, the level will continue to drop. Plants and trees' roots will no longer reach the water table and will begin to die off.

So, what can we do as water disciples? What does God call us to do in order to love our neighbour and preserve the living water for the generations to come?

- We need to try and preserve drinking water for drinking and cooking and use other sources for toilets and gardens. We can re-use shower water (grey water) for gardens and flushing toilets.
- We can reduce our water usage by turning lawns into water wise gardens.
- We can have shorter showers, not have baths, not leave the tap running
- We can look at investing in water harvesting such as jojo tanks.
- We can pull out invasive species which are water guzzlers
- If we have a borehole, make sure that we do not treat it like an endless supply but remember that we are draining a finite source of water.

The use of boreholes becomes an issue of generational justice. During the drought many families, companies and churches rushed to sink boreholes. This is good in the short term as it takes the pressure off the municipal supply, but groundwater is a finite supply. We are using the water resources of the next generation. In some coastal regions, excessive use of groundwater results in saltwater contamination of the aquifers. Miami is one coastal city which already is experiencing this issue.

Let us preserve the living water. Let us make the connections between our communities, for we are one body with the rivers flowing like veins to unite us.

#### References:

Revd Canon P. Houston :Blue theology and Watershed Discipleship in South Africa

(Acta Theologica 2019 39(2):31-47, Dec 2019)

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<sup>i</sup> See Christene Valters Paintner, *Water, Wind, Earth and Fire: The Christian Practice of Praying with the Elements* (Notre Dame: Sorin Books, 2010), p. 101-102.

<sup>ii</sup> Ray Simpson, *The Celtic Prayer Book: Healing the Land - Natural Seasons, Sacraments and Special Services. Vol. One* (Buxhall: Kevin Mayhew, 2003), p. 42.

<sup>iii</sup> St Marks Church East London

<sup>iv</sup> A prayer for World Food Day

<sup>v</sup> Paintner, *Water, Wind, Earth and Fire*, p. 75.