

Giving or Needing Generosity

First Unitarian Church of Wilmington, Delaware, by Rev. Michelle Collins, 2014

Chalice Lighting, by Lindsay Bates

To face the world's coldness, a chalice of warmth.

To face the world's terrors, a chalice of courage.

To face the world's turmoil, a chalice of peace.

May its glow fill our spirits, our hearts, and our lives.

Check In

Reading: Reservoir or Canal, by Howard Thurman

(copy on separate page)

Discussion & Sharing Questions:

- What are some of the positive characteristics and negative characteristics of the canal? The reservoir? The swamp?
- What do these images represent for you?
- When and in what ways have you found yourself to be like each of these? Do you have a dominant type right now? What are some of its strengths and its weaknesses for you?
- We all have swampy times... does your own swampiness make you uncomfortable or are you more or less okay with it?
- When has your canalness, your reservoirness, and your swampiness supported the goals and work of your life?

Closing Thoughts

Extinguishing the Chalice

Reservoir or Canal, by Howard Thurman

Are you a reservoir or are you a canal or a swamp? The distinction is literal. The function of a canal is to channel water; it is a device by which water may move from one place to another in an orderly and direct manner. It holds water in a temporary sense only; it holds it in transit from one point to another. The function of the reservoir is to contain, to hold water. It is a large receptacle designed for the purpose, whether it is merely an excavation in the earth or some vessel especially designed. It is a place in which water is stored in order that it may be available when needed. In it provisions are made for outflow and inflow.

A swamp differs from either. A swamp has an inlet but no outlet. Water flows into it but there is no provision made for water to flow out. The result? The water rots and many living things die. Often there is a strange and deathlike odor that pervades the atmosphere. The water is alive but apt to be rotten. There is life in a swamp but it is stale.

The dominant trend of one's life may take on the characteristics of a canal, reservoir or swamp. The important accent is on the dominant trend. There are some lives that seem ever to be channels, canals through which things flow. They are connecting links between other people, movements, purposes. They make the network by which all kinds of communications are possible. They seem to be adept at relating needs to sources of help, friendlessness to friendliness. Of course, the peddler of gossip is also a canal. If you are a canal, what kind of things do you connect?

Or are you a reservoir? Are you a resource which may be drawn upon in times of others' needs and your own as well? Have you developed a method for keeping your inlet and your outlet in good working order so that the cup which you give is never empty? As a reservoir, you are a trustee of all the gifts God has shared with you. You know they are not your own.

Are you a swamp? Are you always reaching for more and more, hoarding whatever comes your way as your special belongings? If so, do you wonder why you are friendless, why the things you touch seem ever to decay? A swamp is a place where living things often sicken and die. The water in a swamp has no outlet. Canal, reservoir, or swamp – which?

Note: While Dr. Thurman clearly has value judgments about the swamp, I feel that we all have times that come up when we are more like swamps, when we need generosity and inputs and that just gets us through, without our having any more to spare and give away. Recognizing those times can be just as powerful and helpful in knowing ourselves and our own needs and taking care of them, that later we might in turn be available for others.