

**Homecoming
Rev. DC Fortune
September 8, 2024
UU Congregation of the Susquehanna Valley**

This water ceremony is a powerful thing.

It reminds us that we are connected to one another and to the world around us.

Human bodies are made up mostly of water, our planet is covered mostly in water, the air around us carries water as vapor that chills into clouds or fog and rains down upon the earth to nourish all that live here.

It is all connected. We are all connected.

It's been a couple years now since we've come back full strength after Covid.

That pandemic changed all of us.

My grandmother lived through the Great Depression and she saved every bit of string and aluminum foil that came into the house. Those of us who made it through the

pandemic will likely be the generation remembered for stockpiling toilet paper.

That global experience changed us all, left us isolated from one another. We fell out of the habit of visiting each other, doing things, going places, coming to church.

We understand that we will never be able to go back to the way it was before. We cannot and we should not. We learned some big lessons about ourselves, human nature, and epidemiology that will not permit us to behave as we once did.

But it is time to come home.

It is time to reconnect. To remember how to be with other human beings. To remember what it is to have friends over for meals, to meet for coffee, to go to a movie, to simply get up from our own depressive inertia and move our bodies and remember that we are alive.

We have seen some folks begin to come back to church now that we seem relatively safe to do so. We invited several dozen more whom we have not seen in a couple years – most of whom I have never met.

Welcome home, friends. Welcome home to the place that remembers what it is to be kind, to focus on the good in people, to value each person in whatever glorious form of personal expression they bring with them each day.

Homecoming is a time when we notice that things have changed since we've been away.

We've painted some things since you were here last. We painted and moved some stuff. We've got a snazzy curtain back here now, and a very fancy pulpit built by Hutch. We hung some bulletin boards, made some new art, and learned some new things.

We have revamped how religious education works and will be offering Our Whole Lives to high school students for the first time in ... four? Maybe five years?

One of the best things about homecoming is that it offers a chance to start over. Like a new school year, we have fresh notebooks, sharp pencils, a new calculator, and maybe even a new backpack.

If relationships were rough just before Covid hit, now is a great time to renew them with an open heart and open

ears, willing to offer and receive grace, and move forward as the changed people we all are. A pandemic can really change a person's perspective. Old grudges seem unimportant when compared to what we've all just been through.

Let us gather again, at home, and renew ourselves in these connections.

Welcome home, friends.

Welcome to you who have been gone for a while.

Welcome to those who are here every week.

Welcome home to everyone.

Amen.