

February 06

It was the theology of Hollywood at its best. The strings were playing a magnificent movement from the “The Four Seasons” by Vivaldi. The camera was focused on Alan Alda, cast as Jack Burroughs, waxing philosophical on calm, cottage waters from the stern of the boat: ‘all our beginnings are wet ... birth, baptism ...’

In 1981, when Alda’s movie, “The Four Seasons” was released, I was just getting my feet wet as a newly ordained minister with The Presbyterian Church in Canada. I lost count of the number of times I saw this movie. I do know, though, that this scene has played in my memory at every baptism I have had the privilege of celebrating.



Wet beginnings ... our relationship with water is intensely primal. Our earliest ancestors are thought to have been ocean beings; our earliest environment, the warm waters of our mother’s womb. We come into this world with bodies that are mostly water; we make our home on this planet that is mostly water. We live our lives in an intimate relationship with and utter dependence on water. In all its many forms: clouds, rain, rivers, lakes, oceans, snow and ice ... water is basic to our existence. We clearly can’t live long without it.

The magnificent poem which begins our Bible comes from a desert people attempting to rebuild their lives after their hope had utterly evaporated. From the dry recesses of despair come the words which begin the Jewish and Christian traditions. The poetry of Genesis celebrates beginning and beginning again, honoring water as the element that was there even before the dawn of creation: “*When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep and the Spirit of God brooded over the face of the waters*” (Genesis 1:1). Water is basic to our existence and to our essence. According to our story, it is the great matrix of being.

Wet beginnings ... dry endings??? Of all that is endangered, water seems to me to be the most endangered of species. In my lifetime, the single greatest threat to the health of all beings and to the health of our island home may be the very real prospect that we will deplete or destroy that which makes life possible ... fresh water, fairly shared and fiercely protected for generations to come. We appear to be in danger of forgetting the gospel according to Hollywood ... ‘all our beginnings are wet ...’ We appear to be in danger of forgetting the truth of our tradition when spirit broods over water; the truth of our own birth; the truth of our belovedness; the truth of our deep thirst. Are not we and the waters one? What we do to the waters we do to ourselves! It is time to be a neighbor to that which has fallen among thieves (Luke 10:25-37). The neighbor who needs our mercy in this new millennium is water. It is time to speak up, conserve and protect. In the end, everything may depend on it.

With the hope that what we love, we will protect,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nancy Steeves'. The signature is stylized and fluid, with a long, sweeping line for the first letter 'N'.

Nancy Steeves