Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on September 21, 2018:

**Water is a Social Justice Issue**

Deprivation of water threatens the very life of people. It is a basic and fundamental human right and therefore wrong, immoral and unethical to shutoff water to Detroit residents due to delinquent bills. Water is a social justice issue.

The two most indispensable things for survival are air and water. These two elements are essential to the health of all humans and living things. Water is the essence of life, “We made out of water every living thing.” (al-Anbiya, 21:30)

Protecting our environment for clean air is just as important as having access to clean water. The trees absorb the carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide we breathe out among other gasses from the air and release oxygen. One large tree can deliver a day’s supply of oxygen for four people. Is it any wonder the Prophet (SAW) said, “If the Hour (the day of resurrection) is about to be established and one of you was holding a palm shoot, let him take advantage of even one second before the Hour is established to plant it.”

Consider this, had it not been for water that saved Hagar and Ismail’s lives, an entire race of nearly two billion people today would not have existed. The same well of Zamzam that saved the lives of Hagar and Ismail provides drink to millions of people from all walks of life and unite them under one humanity. Water is the source of life and water is what binds us all.

Not only is Ismail (AS), the son of Prophet Abraham (AS), linked to water, other prophets are connected to water as well. Musa (AS), saw springs gush forth when he was instructed to strike the rock with his staff, “And [mention, O prophet!] When Moses prayed for water for his people and We replied, ‘Strike the rock with your staff!’ whereupon twelve springs gushed forth from it, and each tribe (of the 12 tribes of Jacob) knew its drinking place. ‘Eat and drink from God’s provision and do not cause corruption in the land.’” (al-Baqarah, 2:60)

Water is indispensable. It is of the fundamental human rights. The Prophet (SAW) informed, “There are no rights that the son of Adam is more entitled to than these four rights; a house to dwell in, a garment to cover his nakedness, a piece of bread, and water.”

All humans and living things should have the right and access to clean water wherever they may live. Unfortunately, millions in the world living in areas like Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Africa, among other places, don’t have access to clean water. Sadly enough, clean water is lacking in the most privileged of places, right here at home in the US. More specifically, Detroit and the Flint Water Crisis.

In the summer of 2014, the Detroit Water Department decided to shut off water to residents who failed to pay their water bills. The decision to shut off water to low-income families in Detroit is not only disgraceful but a violation of human rights according to the United Nations.
Due to the world water crisis, through Resolution 64/292, the United Nations General Assembly explicitly recognized the human right to water and sanitation and acknowledged that clean drinking water and sanitation are essential to the realization of all human rights. The Resolution calls upon States and international organizations, “To provide financial resources, help capacity-building and technology transfer to help countries, in particular developing countries, to provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all.”

Unfortunately, our government has neglected the plight of Flint, Michigan’s residents and their right to clean water. The government failed to intervene and allowed the infrastructure to crumble. This colossal failure has led to the Flint Water Crisis. The city has faced a major public health emergency due to lead poisoning in the water supply that affected thousands of residents.

The Detroit water shut-offs made international headlines. The United Nations slammed Detroit for violating the basic human rights of its residents by shutting off their water over unpaid bills. The vulnerable Detroit residents who are struggling for access to drinking water, water to bathe in and flush toilets with, are ignored. According to the Detroit Free Press, “The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) approved a controversial permit Monday for Nestlé Waters North America to increase the amount of water it withdraws from the state’s groundwater table from 250 gallons a minute to 400 gallons. Despite vehement opposition to the permit from residents in Osceola County, where the Nestle well is located, and water activists across the state, the DEQ declared the permit met the requirements of the Michigan Safe Drinking Water Act.” Meanwhile, Detroit is shutting off water to its residents who are unable to pay their water bill.

Both the Detroit and Flint Water Crisis have one thing in common, corporate greed. In the case of Detroit, it is no secret that the decision for the shutoff, along with mass tax foreclosures, were a calculated move to drive out residents of low income (or no income) paving the way for more development and the influx of white professionals. It is, as some call it, urban colonization. This is wrong and immoral.

It’s clear that unpaid bills are not the real issue in Detroit. In the name of “cutting government spending,” Flint residents had to face a crisis like never before. Life is the most sacred thing we have in this world, and if we don’t recognize that and act as real humans, caring for human rights and needs, people will continue to face tragedies similar to the Detroit and Flint Water Crisis.

We as a nation are deeply lacking in compassion and empathy. Let us be reminded of the prostitute who was forgiven for her compassion. The Prophet (SAW) reported, “Forgiveness is granted to a prostitute who passed by a dog panting near a well. Thirst had nearly killed him, so she took off her sock, tied it to her veil, and drew up some water. Allah forgave her for that.”

A simple act of compassion caused all her sins to be forgiven. What has become of people? We have become desensitized and numb. The Messenger of Allah (SAW) said, “The parable of the believers in their affection, mercy, and compassion for each other is that of a body. When any limb aches, the whole body reacts with sleeplessness and fever.”

We, Muslims and non-Muslims, black and white, rich and poor, are one community, i.e. one body. When a member of the community is afflicted with hardship and suffering, we must feel their pain. We, the Muslim community, should be at the forefront standing in solidarity with people of conscience fighting for the rights of the weak and vulnerable, fighting for their basic human right, the right to water.

We must put pressure on state and city governments to honor the residents of Flint their right to clean water and Detroit their right to have access to water.

In sum, water is precious and valuable. The Prophet (SAW) was concerned about the environment and the wellbeing of all people. He preached conservation of water even when it is available in abundance. He insists, “Do not waste water even if you were at a running stream.” The Prophet (SAW) one day passed by Sa’id ibn Abi Waqas (RAA) while he was performing wudu’ (ablution). The prophet asked Sa’id, “Why is this wastage?” Sa’id replied “Is there wastage in wudu?” The Prophet said, “Yes, even if you were at a running stream.”
Our body is mainly water. Supply your body with water, not Pepsi or Coke. Water on an empty stomach is healthy, it cools the liver. The Prophet (SAW) said, “The first thing will be said to the person (Allah’s servant) on the Day of Resurrection is, ‘Did I not give you a healthy body and cold water to drink?’” The best water to drink is Zamzam. The Messenger of Allah (SAW) informed, “The water of Zamzam is for whatever it is drunk for.” The companions of the Prophet (SAW) before they drink Zamzam water used to supplicate, “O Allah! I ask you a beneficial knowledge, a good provision, and make it a healing to every illness.”

Giving water to a thirsty person or an animal for that matter is a great charity. Sa’d Ibn Ubadah (RAA) asked the Prophet (SAW), “O Messenger of Allah! My mother died, shall I give charity on her behalf?” the Prophet said, “Yes.” Sa’d then asked, “Which charity is best.” The Prophet replied, “A drink of water.”

The Prophet (SAW) gave the good news of Paradise to those who provide water to thirsty people. He (SAW) said, “Any believer who gives drink to a thirsty believer, Allah will give him a drink from the ‘sealed nectar’ on the Day of Resurrection.”

Lastly, the Prophet (SAW) encouraged digging and building water wells. Imagine receiving the reward of every person that drinks from a water well you sponsor, particularly in areas where water is non-existent. The Prophet (SAW) said, “No thirsty soul, be it a jinn, human or bird, drinks from a well dug by anyone except that Allah will reward him on the Day of Judgment.”

May Allah (SWT) alleviate the suffering of those who are deprived of water, restore water back to them, and help us be a voice for the weak and vulnerable, ameen.

End

1 http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/human_right_to_water.shtml