

A few years ago I was out in northern Arizona with my two boys. We were driving from the Grand Canyon to Flagstaff. Looking out the window of the car I saw large herds of cattle, but no fences. And so it continued. Growing up in the mountains of Washington State I knew that no fences meant no cows. Down the road we stop in a convenience store for gas and a drink. A farmer/cowboy was in the store. Curious, I said to him, "Driving along I noticed herds of cattle, but no fences. I grew up in Washington State, and now live in western Pennsylvania. In both places I know we need fences. Why are there no fences here?" The cowboy/farmer replied, "Cows aren't the smartest creatures. But they are smart enough to know where the water is. Once in a while one will wander off. But they just stay around the well. Somehow they know the well is life. We don't need fences."

In a rapidly changing church and culture, we can build fences, or expand the well. I choose the place of life.

Rev. Glenn Hink, 2013

A traveler became lost in an unnamed desert. Realizing his only chance for survival was to find civilization, he began walking. Time passed, and he became thirsty. More time passed, and he began feeling faint. Reduced to crawling, he was on the verge of passing out when he spied a small shack about 500 meters in front of him. Barely conscious, he reached the shack and called out, "Water! Please, I need water!" An old man appeared in the door of the shack and replied sympathetically, "I am sorry, sir, but I have no water. However, would you like to buy a tie?" With this, he brandished a collection of exquisite silken neckwear. "You fool," gasped the man. "I'm dying! I need water!"

"Well, sir," replied the old man, "If you really need water, there is another shack about 2 kilometers south of here where you can get some." Without knowing how, the man summoned sufficient strength to drag his parched body the distance to the second tent. With his last ounce of strength he tugged at the door of the second shack and collapsed. Another man, looking enough like the old man to be his brother, appeared at the door dressed in a costly tuxedo. Looking down at the crumpled mass at his door, he inquired, "May I help you sir?"

"Water..." came the feeble reply. "Oh, sir," replied the man, "I'm sorry, but you can't come in here without a tie!"

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Monday Morning

A woman, a Samaritan, came to draw water. Jesus said, "Would you give me a drink of water?" (His disciples had gone to the village to buy food for lunch.)

The Samaritan woman, taken aback, asked, "How come you, a Jew, are asking me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" (Jews in those days wouldn't be caught dead talking to Samaritans.)

Jesus answered, "If you knew the generosity of God and who I am, you would be asking me for a drink, and I would give you fresh, living water."

The woman said, "Sir, you don't even have a bucket to draw with, and this well is deep. So how are you going to get this 'living water'? Are you a better man than our ancestor Jacob, who dug this well and drank from it, he and his sons and livestock, and passed it down to us?"

Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again and again. Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst — not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life."

John 4, *The Message*

The Samaritan woman, or the woman at the well, was a woman of questions. She asked the socially taboo question of why Jesus, as a Jew, would speak to her, a Samaritan and a woman. She asked the pragmatic question about where Jesus might get a bucket for the promised living water. And by way of argument, she asked the theological question about where the spirit of God resides. The Samaritan woman has been judged as a cantankerous and stubborn person, but her persistent, even sarcastic, questions bring her to the realization that she is known by this man at the well. She finds her Messiah through her questions.

Mary Zimmer, "The Samaritan Woman: Living Water" in *Sister Images: Guided Meditations from the Stories of Biblical Women*

As dry flour cannot be united into a lump of dough, or a loaf, but needs water, so we who are may cannot be made one in Christ Jesus without the water that comes from heaven.

Irenaeus (130-202)



5th-century mosaic of the Samaritan woman at the well, from Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, Italy

Sinking wells

Come to the waters,
all you who are thirsty:
children who need water
free from diseases,
women who need respite
from labour and searching,
plants that need moisture
rooted near the bedrock,
find here a living spring.
O God, may we thirst
for your waters of justice,
and learn to deny no one
the water of life.

Janet Morley, from *Dear Life:
Praying through the Year
with Christian Aid*

Most loving God, you brought forth from the rock a spring of living water for your thirsty people: bring forth from the hardness of our hearts sincere tears of repentance, that we may be able to weep for our sins and obtain by your mercy their forgiveness. Listen graciously to our prayers, and deliver our hearts from all temptation by evil thoughts, that we may become the dwelling-place of your Holy Spirit, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

from *Christ the Golden-Blossom: A Treasury of Anglo-Saxon Prayer*

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'"

John 7

We are much involved, all of us, with questions about things that matter a good deal today but will be forgotten by this time tomorrow—the immediate wheres and whens and hows that face us daily at home and at work—but at the same time we tend to lose track of the questions about things that matter always, life-and-death questions about meaning, purpose, and value. To lose track of such deep questions as these is to risk losing track of who we really are in our own depths and where we are really going. There is perhaps no stronger reason for reading the Bible than that somewhere among all those India-paper pages there awaits each man and woman, whoever they are, the one question which (though for years they may have been pretending not to hear it) is the central question of his or her own life.

Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC*