

“We drink from our own wells,” is not a Bible verse, but it’s certainly based in Jesus’ declarations, found in John’s Gospel: first to the Samaritan woman, “The water I give will become in them (you) a spring... gushing up to eternal life”; and later, to a crowd in Jerusalem, “Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.”

So what might this phrase mean for us: “we drink from our own wells”?

I’m drawing especially on the experience and reflections of a man who wrote a book with this title: We Drink from our own Wells. Gustavo Gutierrez, a priest from Peru who lived and worked many years among the poor, came to feel that God shows a **preference for the poor**. He came to this through his experience and through his reading of the Bible, especially the life and words of Jesus and the early Christians; so, as followers of Jesus, he contends, we also need to be guided by this truth.

So how do we drink from our own wells, and what does this have to do with the poor?

I want to answer this by drawing both on my experience and the wisdom of this man of God, G. Gutierrez. There seem to be two parts to the answer.

In the first place, John in his Gospel says that, when Jesus said living water will flow out from within the believer, out of such a person’s heart, he meant the Spirit which believers in him were to receive, i.e. the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God. In other words, each one of us who has encountered Jesus have the possibility of accessing this spiritual resource—from within our very selves! Any one who, like the Samaritan woman, asks for the water that Jesus offers, is given the gift of God’s Spirit, which is abundant life, within them, and can always go to this well to drink and be refreshed.

So this is my first and basic message: may we be encouraged to recall those encounters we’ve had with Jesus, those times when we’ve known our thirst, our need, and have opened ourselves to God, to Jesus, to the Spirit—and been touched. I encourage us to know ourselves as recipients of living water, and therefore able to drink from our own wells this water of renewal.

We can ask ourselves, “when did we first experience a yearning for some deep happiness, or for comfort, some release, some wholeness—and when did we actually receive something of what we longed for? And recall not just the

first, but subsequent experiences of yearning and receiving. Because if we have felt very deeply such a longing, then we have probably also received, in some measure, what we longed for—even if we're barely conscious of it.

A year ago, some of us were reading and discussing the book My Grandmother's Hands. We learned there how our bodies carry trauma and we're barely aware of it. I wonder if our bodies and spirits also carry life-giving water that we may have become oblivious to. John, in Revelation, wrote to the Ephesian church to re-member and reactivate the love and works they had experienced "at first" and had abandoned. Perhaps, as with trauma, we access the living water within us by becoming quiet, breathing deeply, humming and rocking, chanting or singing, letting this water flow through, and out of, us. *I wonder if we'd be willing to pause and take about 2 minutes to quiet our minds and our bodies, breathe deeply, and let come what will.* (Pause for two minutes.)

This last week I was in a conversation with a man who shared his life story, which included some very dark moments: loss of vocation, divorce, leukemia, brother's suicide. But in the course of his telling, he exuded such an infectious joy; it was clear he had imbibed the living water of the Spirit of God and was living, animated by it.

May we also drink of this stream, flowing within us, that will never run dry.

Now a second part:

While we drink from our own wells, personally, and the living water we drink is the gift of the Spirit, nonetheless, says G. Gutierrez, this is not a private or merely inner reality. His book, We Drink from our own Wells, is subtitled *the spiritual journey of a people*. In other words, he wants us to realize this phenomenon, this wonder if you will, is a collective one: we drink from our own wells. And really, the story he tells is a remarkable one—of a movement of liberation touching thousands of people, villages, and barrios of L. America over the last 60 plus years.

Without trying to summarize this movement, I want to highlight a particular feature of it: it is the poor who have shaped this spiritual movement. And who are the "poor"? Maybe the best we can do is to say they are those described by Jesus in the Beatitudes: the oppressed, hungry, blind, captives, sick, mourning, meek, merciful. And what has this movement done? Its focus has been *liberation*: the liberation of all people, not just the poor—from sin, guilt and

shame, from despair, and from all oppressive social structures. This is a movement, and spirituality, still very much in process.

One of the prominent words to emerge in this particular spiritual movement is the word *solidarity*: solidarity among and with the poor. There's a recognition that not everyone drawn to this movement can be readily classified as poor; some come with significant privileges. And whether privileged or poor, not all come inclined toward solidarity with others; a very first step therefore is *conversion*: an encounter with the Lord. And that means undergoing God's love, realizing one's belovedness, and that means entry into the *community of the beloved*, and making the journey toward liberation together, a journey that can entail both profound suffering and deep joy.

"We drink from *our own wells*" then means being nourished by God's living water in a particular time and place, with particular companions, faced by particular challenges. True, we don't live in L. America; our circumstances and challenges are our own. But the same Gospel themes and images resonate with us, do they not? We are called and privileged to drink from our own wells, our own reality.

With whom are we called to join in solidarity around the springs of living water? Certainly with our fellow participants in Fellowship of Hope. Are there ways we can deepen our sharing of the Spirit's water of life? No doubt there are, but I remind us that we already have been given profound experiences of solidarity—for example, the story telling around the circle at the retreat last Saturday, in the men's monthly sharing time, and no doubt in small groups, women's groups, spiritual direction groups, and other moments. We can claim these as opportunities to drink from our own wells.

The call to solidarity with the poor in L. America has perhaps a different nuance in our context. I wonder if we're called to seek solidarity with "the poor", yes, but perhaps that's broadened to include all who are "other"—those living in poverty, yes, prisoners, homeless, grieving, yes. But perhaps we'll also find springs of living water, healing of trauma and old wounds in ourselves as we reach out to those of other cultures and race, other sexual identities, other generations, other religious commitments, other political persuasions, even other species. And certainly with any who are neighbors, by all definitions of "neighbor".

I spent a good part of yesterday at a church in Gary IN among a group of 40 some men and boys, all African American, for a Men's Fellowship Breakfast that went till about 2:30 pm. I was with my friends, Pastors Tyrone Taylor and Shawn Lange. Because I've been thinking about this theme, I went to this gathering with the thought that this might be the occasion to drink from someone else's well. And it was that; I was not "at home" with all that happened there. But was there *living water*? Yes, there was; in the conversation, the prayer, the ministry, in the humor and love for each other, life-giving water was flowing, and it touched me. Whatever the word *solidarity* means, I felt held by it. I was drinking, we were drinking, from **our** own well. Solidarity with the other brings wholeness.

May we go often to springs within us that re-member our personal encounter with Jesus at the well. And, may we seek the wells of living water that we can only access with others of God's creatures, with sisters and brothers, and with all who are "other".