

Once upon a time, in the land called South Africa, there was a great drought. The land was dry. There was no water anywhere. Spring came and went but no rain fell. The animals all said "We will have a very wet summer." But summer was dry and very, very hot. By the beginning of winter, the Mutale River had dried up, and if you looked down the village well in the middle of the day, you could not even glimpse water. All the animals were suffering; the snakes, tortoises, elephants, and lions. In the bush the impala, kudu, porcupines and hares were panting for water. In the jackal-berry tree the guinea fowl, crows and baboons sat quiet, their throats too dry to screech or chatter.

King Lion called everybody to attend a meeting. All the animals arrived and they all agreed that during such a time they should forget all grievances and stand together. "We will dig for water in the dry riverbed. Mr Elephant, you will start, you are the strongest of all the animals. You must dig and save our lives."

Mr Elephant dug and dug and dug. "No, Mr Elephant, this will not do. Look, the hole you are making is far too wide, you'll never find water this way," King Lion said.

Mr Kudu started digging. He dug and dug and dug but his hooves were so sharp, the soft river sand just rolled back into the hole.

"No, Mr Kudu, this won't work, you are not getting anywhere. Let Mr Baboon try."

Baboon dug and dug but his mind was clearly somewhere else. Every now and then he would stop and throw the mud around as if in a game.

"No, Mr Baboon, you are not being serious, let someone else try before we all die of thirst."

Then Impala tried, Hare tried, Guinea Fowl and Crow. They all tried. It was useless. They grumbled and complained, then in exhaustion, they sat around the dry river bed.

At last Tortoise slowly stepped forward and slowly started digging. And as he dug, he sang

*Spring up O well, with-in my soul, Spring up O well, and make me whole  
Spring up O well and give to me, that life, abundantly.*

The animals all laughed at him because he was so small. They told him he was crazy because they had already tried digging. But slowly he dug and dug and dug, quietly singing

*Spring up O well, with-in my soul, Spring up O well, and make me whole  
Spring up O well and give to me, that life, abundantly.*

By then it was late afternoon and the animals were tired and miserable. They grumbled and complained. They sat around watching. Some had fallen asleep. The yellow moon soon rose in the east. Some animals were snoring. Others were sighing.

Suddenly there was a splash, splash!

King Lion jumped up, Baboon woke up and so did Kudu and Impala, Elephant and all the animals. They rushed to the water and pushed Tortoise aside. "Get out the way, little one!" They gathered around the hole and drank and drank. They drank until they had their fill, and with full bellies, they wandered off.

The next morning before daybreak, Tortoise was already clearing the hole that had been trampled by all the animals in their rush to drink. He cleared the edges and sang

*Spring up O well, with-in my soul, Spring up O well, and make me whole  
Spring up O well and give to me, that life, abundantly.*

Slowly the hole filled up with clear water. Tortoise stepped into the pool of water and drank and drank.

But just then all the animals arrived back for their early morning drink. "Get out of the way, Mr Tortoise. You're stepping in our drinking water and making it muddy." And they pushed Tortoise aside again.

As Tortoise walked away, he warned them, "This water is for us all to share. If you do not share it, then I tell you, today this water will dry up, all of it!"

The animals laughed and mocked Tortoise. But then, to their utter shock, the water slowly seeped back into the ground, and the hole dried up.

"Now we are in big trouble," King Lion said. "We've insulted Mr. Tortoise and now he took the water away. What are we going to do?"

"We must apologise," Porcupine said. "Let's beg him to come back. Guinea Fowl, you can talk fast and non-stop, you go."

"Ki-ki-ki-ki-ki," said Guinea Fowl, "I'll try, I'll try, I'll try." And off he went.

The animals waited and waited and waited and by midday, when the sun was burning hot, finally Guinea Fowl arrived back with Tortoise.

King Lion stepped forward. "On behalf of all the animals, I apologise for the way we treated you. It is true that we were greedy and did not share the water for us. Please bring it back."

Softly Tortoise began to sing:

*Spring up O well, with-in my soul, Spring up O well, and make me whole  
Spring up O well and give to me, that life, abundantly.*

In front of their eyes, even as they held their breath, the water slowly began to seep up into the hollow. King Lion held back the animals and said, "Mr. Tortoise, please have the first drink." And, after Tortoise had had his fill all the animals, in neat order, had their drink.

And, from that time on, they made sure that they always shared all the water they had; that they also gave thanks for water every day – and that they never again took water for granted.

We've been thinking a lot about water this week at our Summer Camp. We had 12 children here, mostly ages 7-8.

We thought about the beauty of the ocean life in the water as we made aquariums and sea collage pictures, and chatted about the water in the story of creation.

We experimented with the properties of water, and made bubble solution with help from Scientist John Markle

We got VERY wet playing with water balloons.

But most importantly, we thought about all the ways in which we use water, and how we so often take that for granted.

We learned that water is not shared equally around the world, and how quite often the bigger and richer countries have way more water than the poorer ones.

Our story today teaches us about the need to share the commodity of water. The animals were really thirsty for water. In Canada, it's hard for us to understand thirst. You might feel like you need a drink on a hot day, (or on a Friday evening) but have you ever been REALLY thirsty? So thirsty, that you begin to feel dizzy, your stomach aches, you feel weak and nauseous? Just a single drop of water would help!

We get the impression that it was like that for the Israelites. In our scripture today we see that they have journeyed through the dessert. A place where there is no water. They were so thirsty, that they cried out "Give us water to drink!" They were literally dying of thirst.

It's hard for us to imagine, since we live in a place where we can just turn the tap on for clean, safe drinking water.

But, think what it would be like if you had to get up before sunrise every morning and spend hours walking just to find a water source. Then stand in line to access a muddy hole in the ground that you share with both your neighbors, and with the cows and goats. Then, carrying 40 pounds of dirty water all the way home on your back and serving it to the people you love most, knowing that the dirty water might cause stomach pain and diarrhea and even loss of life from water-related diseases.

It's a world most of us don't know. And yet, it's the reality for 785 million people around the world—785 million! That's about 10 percent of everyone living on this planet. And it's not just in developing countries, it is here in Canada too.

I am very pleased to report that since 2015, 108 "Do Not Consume" water advisories have been lifted in our First Nation Communities, but there are still 59 Indigenous Communities that do not have clean running water, and 75% of those are here in Ontario. Some lack any running drinking water, relying only on delivery from trucks and cisterns to collect rainwater, and many households rely on well water that is often contaminated causing a variety of serious illnesses. Water is a basic human right, and it is one that is seriously at risk in First Nations communities across Canada.

Our story and scripture is a lesson about humility and sharing that commodity of water. But it also a lesson on trust in the Divine.

Even though the tortoise is oppressed, criticized, ignored, and laughed at, he still has trust that the Divine Creator will take care of his needs. He sings a song to the Creator, asking not only for water to spring up, but also for the water to make him whole. Water that will give him abundant life!

In the same way, even though Moses was attacked and scoffed at by the Israelites, he also still placed his trust in God's Divine intervention. Just as the tortoise slowly sang to the Creator, so too in our scripture today. Moses called out to God for help.

To begin with, both the animals and the people of Israel had little faith that the Divine Creator God would provide would help them. They grumbled and complained – But, after they received the water – after their thirst was quenched, after they had learned to be humble and share – then they began to realize how blessed they were – and they were grateful, and they changed the ways they continued to live.

And this leads me to think about the properties of the water. Just like our science experiments this week – it makes me ask the question – is there something special about this water?

And the answer is YES.

The water in both the story and the scripture is a symbol of the Living Water that God can provide for us. It not only quenches our thirst, but it can fill us with God's Spirit, so we can live life with joyful abundance. In John 4:14, Jesus says that water alone will not quench your thirst, but faith in the Living Water from God will. It is Living water that quenches our thirst. Jesus said :

*those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life.*

We are here today to celebrate a baptism. It is a way that we use water in the church. We are not going to drink this water to quench our thirsty throats. But we are allowing this water to quench our Spiritual thirst.

- As Dorothy's parents publicly make promises and vows today,
- As we use the water to act out the ritual of blessing Dorothy with God's Spirit,
- As we welcome her and her family into our community of faith

These are all ways that we acknowledge our thirst for God's Holy Divine Living Water of Christ. The animals knew that they needed water to survive. The Israelites knew that their survival depended on water.

We know that we all need safe clean water to live on earth, and that is why, with God's grace, we work towards equitable sharing of that water.

But our spiritual lives are quenched by far more than water. It is our faith in God the source of Love, our desire to live in the way of Christ, love incarnate, and our willingness to be filled with the Spirit, love's power. This is what gives us abundant life – and this is what we celebrate in baptism.

*Spring up O well, with-in my soul, Spring up O well, and make me whole*

*Spring up O well and give to me, that life, abundantly.*