



# Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

The Reverend Alison Wilbur Eskildsen, Parish Minister  
The Reverend Don Randall, Community Minister

---

## “Keepers of the Well”

© by **The Reverend Alison Wilbur Eskildsen**

A sermon delivered August 11, 2013

At the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, GA

### Centering Thoughts

*By means of water, we give life to everything.* Koran, 21:30

*We never know the worth of water until the well is dry.* Thomas Fuller, 1732

*If there is magic on this planet, it is contained in water.* Loren Eiseley

*All water is off on a journey unless it's in the sea, and it's homesick, and bound to make its way home someday.* Zora Neale Hurston

### Homily

By your presence here this morning and by your holy water offerings, we have replenished our community well. The spirit and power you have infused into it will sustain our community in the coming year.

I experienced an actual community well outside my grandparent's old farmhouse in Shapleigh, Maine. Years ago I cranked the well's old-fashioned hand-pump, forcing fresh water to gush out through its spout. Some days the water reluctantly emerged from the depths of the earth, as if the spirit of the well hoarded its crystal-clear treasure. Other days it eagerly burst forth its icy refreshment.

My grandparent's 1700-era farmhouse sits on one of four corners in Shapleigh's only intersection. While alive, my grandfather, the local land surveyor, would welcome folks who stopped by to talk business with a drink from the well. On hot summer days, strangers and friends would stop for a drink, too, then continue on their way. I marveled at how our well was used by so many.

My grandmother was no guardian lizard. She welcomed the thirsty by up-ending a tin cup over the top of the pump. Though I never gave it a thought then, that cup likely never received a wash. I simply rinsed it and held it below the spout. The rinse wasn't for cleanliness—it was to cool down the cup. Metal conducts heat well and that tin cup absorbed the sun's rays, heating it up.

My family doesn't own the farmhouse anymore, but it and the pump can still be seen. I pass by each time I go back to Maine, though it pains me to see the farmhouse neglected by the current

owners. Shapleigh isn't much to speak of anymore, either. People just drive on by, never stopping for a drink or a chat. I'm sure the neglected well went dry long ago.

But we have not neglected our well.

You thoughtfully took time to dip into waters you encountered this summer and intentionally made it an offering to this community. These are holy waters. They symbolize all that you bring to this community and your willingness to share it. You return, if not each week as often as you can, and you share who you are—your talents, treasures, and stories. We return because we long for something more in our lives. We thirst for more meaning, more feeling, more connections to others, more understanding, and just more than meets the eye.

We drink from our well seeking this something more. We listen, we learn, we laugh, and we comfort one another by our well. Sometimes the water may refresh more than other times, but we can count on its being there for us. But without our continued presence, our well would run dry.

Thomas Fuller said we only learn water's worth when the well runs dry. Let that not be us. Let us know our well of community's worth and not let it run dry. Unlike Lizard, let us generously share our lives with each other always.

May it be so.

### **Questions for Reflection or Discussion**

1. In what ways is this community meaningful to you or might come to be meaningful to you?
2. Share a time you may have 'dipped' into a well of community for its life-saving gifts.
3. Reflect on a time when you felt particularly connected to actual life-giving waters.



