



Deep Water: Swimming When You Can't Touch Bottom
Luke 5:1-11

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, Sunday, February 10th, 2019
First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois
The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel

Text: Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch. (v. 4b)

I believe that you don't "really" know how to swim until you feel comfortable swimming in water where your feet don't touch the bottom, that is, until you are in truly deep water. Water deep enough that you cannot see the bottom. Deep enough where little "things" touch your feet and bump against your bottom. Swimming in deep water takes courage. You need the courage to face the mysterious deep and the courage to believe in something greater than yourself.

Swimming in deep water is an appropriate metaphor for today's gospel lesson. On the surface, the story is a simple lesson of the call to discipleship, but implicit in that call are insights into what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

First, you have to be willing to be inconvenienced. The fishermen were washing their nets. (v. 2)

They were cleaning up after a night of fruitless effort when Jesus told them to go "out into the deep and put down their nets." I once knew a church custodian who meticulously cleaned chalkboards and absolutely hated when his pristine boards were used, especially by children! The beauty of the perfect gave way to the messiness of the utilized. He couldn't comprehend that his job was to get things ready for use and that messy chalk boards were the source of "job security." All that he could see was the mess.

Discipleship is messy. It is not about "clean nets". It is not for the faint of heart. It means doing the most mundane tasks over and over again even when you are tired and frustrated.

Recently I saw the movie "The Upside" which is based on the true story of an African American parolee who is hired to be the "body man," literally the arms and legs, hands and feet of a billionaire quadriplegic. He not only has to get the man up in the morning, feed him breakfast, bath him, put him to bed at night, but take care of his bodily needs. Sometimes those bodily needs were messy and smelly. While these necessary duties were done with a certain comic air, it was nevertheless, messy work that turned into a deep abiding friendship.

Being inconvenienced may not mean caring for a quadriplegic, but will mean being present when someone learns that a loved one is never coming home again, cleaning up a house or a yard for someone else, volunteering among the homeless, helping a child read, visiting a mission project to learn first hand the nature of the ministry, to name only a few things.

Secondly, discipleship means not knowing the meaning of the word “quit.” Master, Simon said, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet, if you say so, I will let down the nets. (v.5)

Disciples do not make well-worn excuses like, “We tried this before, and it didn’t work” or “That’s not who we are”, or “Isn’t there someone else who can do this”, or “Whose job is this, anyway?” Disciples simply roll up their sleeves and get to work not caring about credit or blame. They are a lot like farmers who plant a crop in the same field again and again after a flood or wet weather. There is a cost but their is a greater cost in not doing the work.

Disciples do not use excuses like “precedence” because disciples know that precedence is illusionary; there are no two situations exactly alike. They understand the wisdom of an ancient Greek philosopher who noted that you can never step into the same river twice--even in the same day, even moments apart--because the water is constantly flowing, changing, always different.

“Precedent” can be a guide but it must never be a barrier. No two situations are ever exactly like. The resources are different, the times are different, and the people are different. I’ve often thought that we try to avoid using the gray matter between our ears by playing a trump card called “Precedence”.

Third, disciples obey Jesus and drop their nets into “deep water” anticipating “God’s surprising catch”. (v. 4)

When Donna Haerr had the vision that is now called Wana Wa Mola the Mission Committee set up a task force not only to explore the possibility and viability of this mission and ministry but to find an international partner who could oversee this ministry in East Africa. Many leads were pursued and proved fruitless. One very dark night as Sue and I sat at a red light at the corner of War Memorial Drive and University I said to her that it seemed as if all of the possible mission partners did not want to go to Mombasa. The task was simply too daunting. I remember very clearly that she replied, “Well, who would want to go to Mombasa, it’s hell.” And then, after a momentary pause, she continued, “But what better place for the church to go?” As Jesus said to his disciple, Peter, “I will build my church upon this rock and the gates of hell will not overcome it.” Within a short time after that night, Cornerstone Development of East Africa stepped forward and an expedition team of Drs. John Nixon, Fred Hoy, and myself traveled to Uganda, Ethiopia, and Kenya to ascertain the need and viability of this mission. The mustard seed of the ministry was sown and today First Federated Church can take pride in knowing that hundreds, if not thousands of lives have been changed for the better as street boys of Mombasa have been transformed from chakora to wanawamola; from “garbage children” to “children of God.”

The fourth element of discipleship is to acknowledge our own sinfulness. Simon Peter fell down at Jesus’ feet saying, ‘Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!’ (v. 8)

“Grace, grace, God’s grace, Grace that will pardon and cleanse within; Grace, grace, God’s grace, Grace that is greater than all our sin!” Those lyrics were written in the early 20th century by Julia Johnson, the daughter of one of First Presbyterian Church’s ministers. They remind us that we are undeserving of God’s grace, and yet we receive it. The baptismal font and the communion table remind us of beneficent amazing grace that saves a sinner like me. God does not give us the grace of forgiveness for us to hold on to like a hoarder holding onto gold. God gives it to us so that we can share it with the world, touch the lives of God’s children, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick, the imprisoned, and forgotten.

Tony Campolo once told the story of meeting with a women's organization in a very wealthy church Pennsylvania church. The women closed their meetings by praying for the needs of the "needy". On this afternoon Campolo was asked to offer a prayer for a particular person or ministry that needed a new refrigerator. He looked around the room at the women. He had heard their table conversation over refreshments. He knew that many of them had been driven to the meeting by their chauffeur and that the chauffeur was waiting outside for them. When he prayed he asked God to open the ladies' hearts so that out of their bounty they could meet the "refrigerator need" of this ministry. I don't know what happened next but I suspect that they never asked Campolo to pray again! (Story remembered from the video educational series entitled "Affluenza")

Process theology tells us that God will not do for us what we can do ourselves, but God will be with us in the doing of the task. In the old movie "God Almighty" the main character played by Jim Carrey asked God to perform a miracle. God responded by telling Carrey that people are always asking for God to perform a miracle but that like Carrey they do not know what a miracle is. God challenged Carrey to be the miracle instead of waiting for a miracle.

And this brings us to the final element of discipleship. Discipleship means that we have to be willing to do something. We have to be willing to risk going out into waters so deep that we are over our heads. We have to be willing to "take a flier" and risk failure. Isn't this willingness to act on behalf of God at the very heart of Jesus' parable about the three stewards who were entrusted with the Master's money. It was the one who played it safe by burying the money that missed the Master's pleasure.

May each one of us swim in deep waters. And in our splashing glorify God. Amen.