

## Go Deep

Preached FCCW, February 10, 2019

Luke 5:1-11

At staff meeting on Tuesday morning – which coincided with the Patriots’ Super Bowl victory parade -- someone inferred that this morning’s sermon title had something to do with that game. Since “go deep” is something that a quarterback typically tells a receiver before he throws a long bomb in his direction – like the one Tom Brady threw to Rob Gronkowski to set up the game winning touchdown – it was suggested that maybe that play had some influence on the sermon title.

Alright. Maybe it had a teensy bit to do with it.

But there’s no denying that “go deep” is just as applicable to Jesus’ advice Simon Peter that resulted in a miraculous catch of fish. That story begins in the shallow waters, where Peter and his crew are cleaning their fishing nets. Actually, the boats are beached on the shore. The same shore where a crowd has gathered to hear Jesus preach.

Peter had more important matters to tend to – such as cleaning the fishing nets that he relied on for his livelihood -- to be paying much attention to whatever Jesus was teaching this mob of people, who obviously had nothing better to do than stand around and listen to him. That is, until Jesus climbed into his boat and asked Peter to take him out into the shallow waters to put some distance between himself and the steadily-growing audience that surrounded him. After he was finished preaching, Jesus asked Peter to put out into the deep water.

There’s any number of reasons Jesus could have given for Peter to push out into the deep waters. He could have said, “Put out into the deep water and drop me off on the other side of the Lake so I don’t have to walk all the way around to get to my next preaching engagement.” He could have said, “Put out into the deep water so I can take a break from the needs and expectations of the crowds; to relax and enjoy the sun on my face and the wind in my hair.” What he *actually* said was, “Put out into the deep water *and let down your net for a catch.*” It sure sounds like putting out to deep water was more for Peter’s benefit than Jesus’.

Coming from anyone other than Jesus, Peter would have dismissed this request to head back out, as a cockamamie idea. After all, he and his crew had just come

back from a night of fishing the deep waters and came back empty-handed. Why get the nets they had just spent the morning cleaning, dirty again for nothing? But, because it is Jesus giving the command, Peter reluctantly followed orders. He goes deep. He casts his net.

And, this time he catches fish. Not just some fish. So much fish that the weight of them threatens to send Peter's boat, and another boat that comes to give them a hand, to the bottom of the Lake. So many fish, where mere hours before there were none, that Peter is driven to his knees, crying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man."

Out in the deep, deep waters, it is Peter who is swept up in the net of God's love. He addresses Jesus as "Lord" because nobody but the One who stocks the rivers and seas with fish could create a miracle like this. And, he calls himself a "sinful man" because he is suddenly aware of the shallowness of his relationship with God.

We are all a little like Peter in that way, aren't we? How much of our lives are lived in the shallow waters, our attention absorbed by the seemingly endless parade of obligations and necessities and pursuits of what we hope will bring the happiness and fulfillment we are fishing for. There is little mystery or risk to be found in shallow waters. We can sink our toes into the sand beneath our feet. We can carefully plan our next step as we wade close to the security of the shore. We can see clearly to the bottom.

Deep waters are a different matter. Going deep means less clarity and more mystery. We can't say for certain what, if anything is waiting below the surface. Deep Water Wisdom, though, says if you want to catch big fish, you have to go where the big fish go. And that means putting out into deep waters.

The turning point in Peter's life comes in that moment when he lets Jesus talk him into traveling uncharted waters. And right where he had abandoned all hope of finding what he was looking for, he finds more abundance than he can handle. That's when Jesus tells him that, from now on, he will fish for what feeds the soul instead of just the belly. "From now on you will catch people" is what it says in our Bible. Other translations say a bit more poetically, "You will become fishers of men."

What this tells us as Christians, is that we are called to be active participants in Christ's mission to invite others to partake in the abundant life God wants for us. But we can't share what we don't possess. If we are stuck in the shallows where we aren't really experiencing the abundant life Jesus promises for ourselves, how can we lead others to the deep waters for them discover it for themselves?

Shallow water wisdom sabotages our willingness to venture into the uncharted waters of life, where faith is the only compass we have to guide us. It tells us that time spent in church on Sunday mornings, or praying in our homes, is time that could be invested in more productive ways. Sometimes even people who do pray and read the Bible and go to church diligently, find that their spiritual lives can grow shallow and mechanical and lacking real depth.

The vital signs of a church are not always measured at the surface. By the attractiveness of its building or the size of its endowment. Those things are important. But the true health of a congregation is found in the depth of its spiritual life. In its willingness to go deep in its relationship with God, and its commitment to the path of discipleship. Where member's life within and life outside the church are not in constant competition for their time and energy. But where life in the world becomes the context for living out their faith.

This story ends with Peter and his fellow fishermen, leaving their boats and nets on the shore to follow Jesus into the deep waters of discipleship. I don't believe the point of this story is that Jesus calls us to literally chuck all our responsibilities aside and go off the grid in order to be his followers. Often, the work God is calling us to can be accomplished right where we are. Sometimes the deep waters are all around us, just waiting for us to cast our nets.

Frederick Beuchner offers these words of Deep Water Wisdom:

"There are all different kinds of voices calling you to all different kinds of work, and the problem is to find out which is the voice of God rather than of Society, say, or the Super-ego, or Self-interest. By and large a good rule for finding out is this. The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (a) that you need most to do and (b) that the world most needs to have done. If you really get a kick out of your work, you've presumably met requirement (a), but if your work is writing TV deodorant commercials, the chances are you've missed requirement (b). On the other hand, if your work is being a doctor in a leper colony, you have

probably met requirement (b), but if most of the time you're bored and depressed by it, the chances are you have not only bypassed (a) but probably aren't helping your patients much either.

The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.”

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