

Deep Waters
by Rev. Sharon Lee MacArthur
For Berkeley Chinese Community Church
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Luke 5:1-11

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."

When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

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Nobody is on top of the world every day.



Everyone has ups and downs.

Sometimes the world is sweet and sometimes it is sour.

Sometimes life moves along briskly and we accomplish what we set out to do and we meet our personal goals. And sometimes things get stuck and we experience failure and life comes to a halt. We don't know how to get out of what we got ourselves into in the first place...



Today's gospel reading is about three such men - discouraged men - four actually if you count Andrew - Simon Peter's brother who appears in other accounts of this story.

They were fishermen – we're not talking recreational fishermen – these were professionals - workers whose families went hungry if there was no catch. Jesus had met them before - when

they were associated with John the Baptist - in fact he had been to Simon Peter's house and cured his mother-in-law of a high fever.

It was a very bad day for the fishermen. They had fished all night and caught nothing. Now it was morning, the morning after a night of failure, and the men were washing their nets so they'd be ready for the next night's work.

There was a crowd on the beach near where they were working. A big crowd. They were listening to Jesus - pressing in upon him. Jesus is in the water - out a way from the crowd. Suddenly Jesus steps into Simon's boat. "Put out a little way from shore", he asks Peter, and he does.



And from the boat Jesus continues to teach the crowds. Jesus in his floating pulpit has a better view of the crowd and they of him. Finally he is done and the crowd goes home.

Jesus then turns to Simon. "Go to the deep water," he tells him, "and let your nets down for a catch."

Hmmm - that was really something! - Jesus, a landlubber, telling a professional fisherman how to do his business. And Peter - who is not shy about speaking his mind - answers Jesus immediately - by explaining the facts of life to him.

"It won't do any good," he says, "We have worked all night - and we've caught nothing. There is no point to it."

We can probably all relate to Peter's statement - We sometimes do our best. We work hard. And the results are zero.

- We've messed up on the pattern on a knitting project for the umpteenth time.
- Or, an important friendship sours because of what we said and there is nothing we can do.
- We sit at the computer for hours to write something to meet a deadline and nothing comes
- The harder you try - the less you produce.

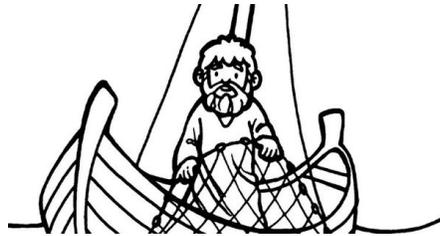
Maybe you, too, have been in that place where all your wisdom tells you - just give up. All these obstacles are telling us - I'm not supposed to be doing this!

At times like that, the last thing we want to hear - the last thing we NEED to hear from anyone are the words "try harder".

Peter and Andrew, James and John - they're professionals - professional fishermen - they knew their business. They knew the lake...they knew where the fish congregate..they knew the kind of weather you had to have to bring in a good catch. Their families had been working the lake for generations. They knew their business - they knew when to fish - and where to fish - and they had gone fishing - at the right time - and at the right place - and had come up empty.

"Try over there", Jesus says. "over there in the deep water - let your nets down for a catch."

These professionals didn't need to hear that from anyone! "Try harder, try something different". So Peter protests -"Master, we have worked all night long - we've done everything we should have done - we've everything we were taught to do by our fathers and there fathers before them, but we have caught nothing... but - if you say so - I will let down the nets."



Why Simon agrees to row out into the deeper water – who knows. Maybe he did it because he was learning to trust Jesus - maybe he did it to humor him - maybe it was because of something in Jesus' tone of voice. Whatever the reason, Peter agrees to do what Jesus asks of him.



You know the story from here - They threw the nets out from Simon's boat and caught so many fish that the nets began to break. They caught so many fish that when John and James came alongside and helped load the boats - the boats began to sink.

It was an amazing catch. A catch made in deep water. A catch where there should have been no catch. A catch taken at a time of day when there should have been no catch.

I know that many messages on this passage have centered on how we are called to be soul catchers - how like Simon Peter and Andrew and James and John we are called to leave everything behind, all our ordinary concerns and worries and frets and cares and focus on winning people for God.



But I'm not so sure about that today - the image of fish struggling to be free of the nets haunts me - catching souls and pulling them in doesn't sound very just and peace-filled to me. Leaving everything behind including our families and all that we know? I don't know - aren't relationships important?



I read something about Mother Theresa - she's the one of those who walked away from everything and spent her life serving the poor. But in an interview - she said that Americans are always saying they want to leave their lives here and go to India to work with her. And to them, she said, "Stay right where you are, and love the people God has given you to love. Care for people right where you are."



Sounds like from Mother Theresa's perspective - following Jesus is **not** synonymous to leaving our homes and families, or live on the streets or be in a faraway place like Calcutta. We can follow Jesus AND be with our families at home - The water is plenty deep right here, right where we live. There's plenty of challenge, plenty of possibility, and a very clear call to serve right here, where we are.



So today something else capture's my attention - the deep waters....."deep waters" are not only the wet stuff we dive into – but also represent those places we would rather not go, the places of discomfort and unfamiliarity, where we might "get in over our heads"

- Places like seeking out someone who has hurt us forgiving them – can we let go of the feeling of being right, of being justified, of being the victim?

- Scary and unfamiliar places like offering our gifts to the community around us, our time and our talents and our treasures in ways that help others and build up the community of God's children – especially if we've never done that before!

**PROPOSED BUDGET
FOR 2019**

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Today, we will be asked to take a look at a proposed budget for 2019 – an all time high! Talk about deep waters – it's a scary number we're asked to approve! It's uncharted territory – a budget that takes into account salaries for not only a new settled senior pastor, but a part time Cantonese speaking pastor **and** a youth leader. It is a leap of faith!

We will be asked to dig deeper into our pockets. We will be asked to invest in this Berkeley Chinese Community Church... We will be asked to invest in the belief that we have something special here....we have good news and good works to share with folks we have around us and beyond AND we are seeking partners in this ministry - YOU!



Maybe, logic tells us, we'll not be able to do this - that many things could go wrong, that it's a waste of money, that we would be better off just forgetting about these new ideas and sticking with our traditional no-pain, no-gain budget.

Sure - we can do that – we could stay in the shallow water, and be satisfied with whatever... no fish?...a continually dwindling congregation?... be satisfied even if we're not happy in with the results...



Old fears and new ones lurk in the deep waters of our lives. Fears like –

- I've never given that much to church before! That means I have to give up something!



The thing is.... living life in God is a call that takes us to new places...sometimes uncomfortable places!

- Like deep waters but if we venture into it – God shows up and those same scary deep waters may be filled with rich rewards.



- These deep waters and places of transformation are right where we are, with the people we love and know. The thing is – it'll take imagination for it happen! It'll take courage, trust, and radical openness to all the epiphanies all around us...to all the wonders that challenge our expectations. Then Transformation can happen!

Renita Weems, puts it simply and beautifully, the last thing those tired fishermen were expecting was a showing of God's awesome power right there, at the end of another workday...a frustrating one at that!

And then I remember – other times when God showed up! When Jesus showed up and surprised us – just like Weems said. And our lives are changed!



There was a time when a normal every day kind of Council meeting meant some 12 or 13 leaders got together to talk about the business of the church. They voted on proposals and actions and ministries and sometimes there were residual ill feelings because the council was split and folks voted against the wishes of fellow council members.

And into that ordinary process, God showed up – someone had the idea that decisions would be better made by consensus –



when these same council members talk things out and get to accept *together* a proposal before the body. Relationships are valued and honored. Another step closer to God. Another step toward unconditional love and peace. That was entering deep waters, folks! And the benefits abound. BCCC was being transformed from a divided church to a united and uniting church – becoming one in God kind of church!

That's a big deal! Worth telling people about – that's getting closer to God's unconditional love! That's sharing God's unconditional love and closer to Gods peace-filled loving church family!

Think about other deep water experiences you have had in your life...think about those we have had together!



How about our first fundraising luau? I understand that once upon a time we had a luau here – but those who were a part of it either forgot about it or are no longer with us! But **this** year we braved those scary deep waters and partnered with Kumu Analu and his halau and hosted a luau! We were nervous about the outcome – most of us had never put on one before...so - the whole church and beyond pitched in and Luau 2018 was a sellout success. The unexpected benefit? we netted almost twice our original goal! The way I see it - God showed up and guess what - we are considering designating this to be an annual affair...we are considering claiming the Halau with its cultural education in addition to the hula training, a ministry of this church; and we are considering taking this to the next level – (with God's help, of course) transforming this luau into a community event – what a gift to the community! Imagine this...venturing into those scary deep waters was actually another step toward oneness...another step toward God...toward God's dream of a peace-filled world!

So, today as we meet as this church – to consider our future – don't be afraid of deep waters – we know from experience that God shows up – AND we know from experience that venturing into those deep waters can be an opportunity for another step toward blessings beyond our imagination – another step toward sharing the good news...God's unconditional love...and a promise of a loving, just and peace-filled world.

Come, let us take those steps together – *and as Jesus continues to remind us...let us not be afraid to go into the deep waters of our lives.* Amen.