

The Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
February 7, 2010
St. Mark Presbyterian Church in Boerne, Texas
David M. Evans, Interim Pastor

“Into Deep Waters”

Jesus commandeers Simon Peter’s boat at the beginning of the 5th chapter of the gospel of Luke. Jesus asks Peter to launch his boat into *deep waters*. Listen for the Word of God as it is recorded in the 5th chapter of the gospel of Luke:

Luke 5:1-11

The story is told that two land surveyors were sent from a large city in Wales to an area in northern Wales where the mountains meet the sea. They stayed for a week at an isolated shepherd’s cottage deep in the mountains. During the day the surveyors climbed the steep slopes: charting the contours of the land, checking the landmarks, and tracing the mountain streams to their sources. Each night they returned to the shepherd’s cottage.

One night near the end of the week...as the surveyors were preparing for bed...the old shepherd suggested that he might better accompany them on the mountain the next day. “*There’s no need.*” the confident surveyors from the city replied. “*We can’t possibly get lost. We have our compass, our charts, and the maps.*” Still, “*I’d better come with you,*” the old shepherd insisted.

“*There’s really no need,*” the surveyors replied again. “*The map will bring us home.*”

“*But,*” the old man persisted, “*I know the mountain tracks like the back of my hand. I know where the steep precipices are. I know where the bog runs deep. I know where the bracken covers the crevices.*”

“*It’s all on the map,*” repeated the city surveyors. “*The map will bring us home.*”

The old shepherd was quiet for a moment and then spoke once more:

“*You may have the map, but the fog (that rolled in this morning) isn’t on the map.*”

I, for one, am always awed by someone who knows their way around a particular landscape, someone who is familiar with every rock and tree and where the sun will set at particular times of the year. I had a rough time when I first moved from Austin to Corpus Christi. I missed my beloved Hill Country terribly. Then I discovered the joy of salt-water fishing. I was introduced to the waters of Corpus Christi Bay and the *Laguna Madre* by people who knew these waters as well as most of us know the rooms of our own home. What looks to the untrained eye like simply a huge, unchanging body of water is actually alive with clues to those who know their way around.

Those who know the deep channels where their boat can safely navigate. Those whose trained eyes can literally see a school of speckled trout as they move through the shallow waters. Those who know the shelves where redfish are likely to be. It takes a long time to know a place this well.

It would be absurd for me to attempt to tell someone like this where to find fish in this vast expanse of water. Simon...whom Jesus would later rename Peter... knew Lake Gennesaret this way. He knew this lake as well as you know your back yard. He knew where the warm mineral waters of the springs flowed into the vast lake. He knew that these warm waters drew fish into the coves making them the most likely place to catch fish. Simon and his brother Andrew had been fishing this lake all their lives and their father and grandfather had likely fished it all their lives before them.

Then one day a Galilean carpenter walks along shore of the lake with a crowd following him. He stops and watches as Simon and Andrew sit mending and washing their nets after a long and very unproductive night of fishing. Then without warning he decides to make Simon's boat a pulpit and he climbs into the boat and asks Simon to put out a way from the shore. And from Simon's boat turned pulpit the Galilean carpenter begins to teach the Word of God to the people standing eagerly on the shore. One can imagine Simon and Andrew listening intently as Jesus preaches what could only have been words that were good news to their ears.

What happens next is one of many things that intrigues me about this text. When the carpenter finished teaching he told Simon to take the boat even farther out into the lake and there to let his nets down for a catch. Simon has fished Lake Gennesaret all his life and knows that the only place to catch fish on this lake is in the shallow coves. What could this Galilean carpenter know about fishing? So Simon simultaneously protests and obeys saying:

*"Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!
But at your word I will let down the nets."*

The rest is history. When they let down their nets there are so many fish that the nets begin to tear and they ask for help from the shore to bring in their haul.

And when they finally haul the fish in there are so many that the boat begins to sink. For Simon the only appropriate response to such a miracle is to fall down on his knees and confess:

"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

The carpenter knows nothing about fishing but he is full of the power of God. And even more he loves these fishermen more than life itself. And he will prove it to them when they betray him and then he will die for them so that they could live life abundantly. Looking with love on these fearful creatures kneeling in the boat the carpenter says to Simon:

"Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people" instead of fish.

I'm sure you know by now that the carpenter who presumably knows nothing about fishing is Jesus. And the words he uses to tell Simon and Andrew and James and John that they will be catching people literally means *"you will be taking people alive."*

There is more to Jesus' command to take his boat out into deep waters than simply the matter of catching fish. The move from shallow waters to deep waters could very well be a metaphor for the life of faith. Jesus' call to Simon and Andrew is at the very least the call to see that there is more to life than simply making a living. Jesus' call to these

hard-working fishermen is to a life of meaning and purpose. It is a call to trust Jesus to lead them from the safe and familiar shallow waters in which we live most of our lives and into the deeper waters where true life is to be found.

Those who follow Jesus into deep waters put their trust in this one who is the way, the truth, and the life. And that leads us into some deep waters. We who are called to discipleship are called to deeper waters. We are allowed our opinion. But it must be an opinion that is hammered out on the anvil of prayer and one that is immersed in the Word of God and one that is shaped by our conversations with other believers. For we are called to believe not simply what is convenient or what is popular or what we prefer.

We are called to struggle daily with the gospel of Jesus Christ and we are called to remember daily that we have been baptized and that the mark of the cross is on each of our foreheads and that fact alone demands that we think deeply and prayerfully about the small issues and the great events that challenge us to live faithfully before our Lord. When Jesus called Simon and Andrew he led them from the shallow waters of safety into the deep waters of life. Jesus calls us to do the same.

A small sign chiseled in Gaelic hangs over the front door of a chapel in the Scottish Highlands. The sign invites those who enter the chapel with these words: *“Come as you are, but do not leave as you came.”*

When we first step into the waters of the life in Christ it is acceptable to splash around in the shallows. We come as we are. But if we continue to follow Jesus he will not leave us the same. He will lead us to places where the fog is thick and only he can keep us safe. His transforming love will lead us into the deeper waters of faith...and there our lives will never again be the same. AMEN