

Rejoice! The River Is Here!
“Diving Deeper”
Luke 5:1-11

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Did you hear the story about the toddler who fell out of bed one night? Hearing the fall, the father rushed to the room, picked up the kid, dried his tears, and put him back to bed. When things calmed down a bit, the Dad asked his son, “What happened, what caused you to fall out of bed?” Still sobbing, the toddler said, “I don’t know, I guess I went to sleep too close to where I got in.”

Living on the edge is a problem, not just for toddlers, but Christians, as well. Some of us have stepped into the kiddie pool of God’s grace, but have yet to experience the thrill of diving deeper. We’ve gotten our feet wet, but have not yet known the joy of having our souls soaked. If that strikes a chord with you, then diving deeper on the River of Life is designed for you. And that’s what I would like to talk about today.

WHEN SURFACE FAITH IS NOT ENOUGH, IT MAY BE TIME TO PUSH OUT INTO THE DEEP. Our scripture lesson is a fish story to write home about. It contains the sting of disappointment, as well as the adrenalin of success. Peter, James and John are washing their nets from a bad night of fishing when Jesus comes along and swipes one of their boats to use for a pulpit. When the sermon is finished, Jesus says to Peter, “*Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch*” (Verse 4). Can you imagine the look on Peter’s face? Here’s a carpenter telling the Zebedee Fish Market Crew how to catch fish. Besides they’ve been fishing all night which is the time to fish, in the shallow water where fish are usually found and now they are enduring that painful question that people always pose to fishermen. “Are you catching anything?”

No wonder Peter is less than enthusiastic in his obedience in Verse 5: “*Master we have worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.*” Of course, you know the rest of the story. They catch so many fish that their nets begin to break and they have to call for help. I shall not try to explain the miracle. I only invite you to embrace its message.

Is Jesus calling you into the deeper waters of discipleship? What are the signs that signal the time for a move? Are you willing to obey—to go with Him all the way?

One nudge to deeper waters may be DISAPPOINTMENT. “*Lord, we’ve worked hard all night and caught nothing.*” Or as I hear it expressed, “I’ve been faithful for years, what difference has it made?” Do you ever feel that way? Is your religion a load or a lift?

We start the Christian life with high hopes and great expectations. We believe God can do anything but fail—then illness strikes, divorce happens, death comes, jobs disappear and God doesn't seem so mighty anymore. Today we are torn between the desire to quit and the courage to carry on. Or we've given ourselves to church service and invested our energy in church systems. We've endured our blows from church politics. It's all taken a toll. We've hurt so much that we've become uncaring, unconcerned, unexcited, unmoved, and untouched. Today we feel like the apathetic owl who just doesn't give a hoot anymore.

John Ortberg tells about a church member by the name of Ralph whose native tongue was complaint. Even in a sea of happiness Ralph could always find that silver lining of unpleasantness. He had that gift, felt it was his calling. He could see the bad side of everything. His main complaint was that the music was too loud. He'd go up to visitors and say "Don't you agree the music is too loud?" John said when I got a call from OSHA one day talking about the sound decibels at airports and music concerts and that they had to investigate a complaint from the church, I knew that it had to be Ralph. The problem was that nobody at the church believed Ralph could change, so he didn't change. Someone should have called him into a deeper life of discipleship so that his mind could have been on higher things. Instead, we just let him be disappointed and disillusioned. Ralph needed to push out into the deep and let down his net for a better catch.

Another nudge to deeper waters may be DESIRE. There is a spiritual hunger in America for authentic spirituality. In the deeper waters there are mysteries to be explored, wonders to be experienced, breath-taking views of a better life. Like a curious explorer on their first scuba dive, we are anxious to see what lies below the surface of our faith.

Jesus said, *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied."* Happy are those who have a deep desire to know God. They won't be disappointed. It might be a small group of youth, it might be a prayer group that you are in or it could be a Sunday school class. Blessed are those who are hungry and thirsty for God. God will honor them. Are you being called to push out into the deeper waters of faith and explore the mysteries of His grace?

WHEN SURFACE FAITH IS NOT ENOUGH, IT MAY BE TIME TO CONFESS OUR SINS. In Verse 8 we read, *"When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knee and said, 'Go away from me Lord; I am a sinful man.'"*

Someone said confession is good for the soul. It always is. The closer we get to God, the more conscious we are of our shortcomings as human beings.

There are however, some things confession is not:

- Confession is not blabbing our secrets. If talking about sin was the same as confessing our sins, our society would be on a confessional binge. No people on earth has let it all hang out the way we do. Celebrities and politicians race

each other to the publishers with their tell-all manuscripts under their arms playing to a voyeuristic public that can hardly wait to read the sordid details of another's affair.

- Confession is not explaining our sins. Pete Rose finally ended his fourteen year streak of denying he bet on baseball by admitting he wagered while managing the Cincinnati Reds. However, Rose denied he had a gambling problem. "I may have broken the letter of the law," said Pete Rose, "but I never broke the spirit of the law. I never allowed my wagers to influence my baseball decisions."

If confession is not blabbing our secrets or explaining our sins, then what is it?

- Confession is being honest. We can't expect God to cover what we are not willing to uncover. The first step of confession is owning where the real problem lies, and then to face it. Charles Wesley said, "I want a principle within of watchful, Godly fear, a sensibility to sin, a pain to feel it near." Are you drinking too much, gambling too often, taking too many prescription pills? Are you obsessing on money, sex, success, ambition? Do you gossip, cheat on your expense accounts, put yourself in the center of your universe? Get on your knees and bring your sins to the Lord and leave them there. Only then can God's grace come to you and change you and transform you. That's what confession is all about. It is to be honest.
- Confession is being humble. Isaiah sees the Lord high and lifted up in the temple and his immediate response is "*Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips.*" Authentic humility keeps us facing God. The self-consuming flames of shame can become the cleansing tears of sorrow, which turn into tears of gratitude before God's healing grace. What does it mean to confess? It is to be honest and to be humble.
- Confession is being helped.
Deeper, deeper, blessed Holy Spirit
Take me deeper still.
Till my life is wholly lost in Jesus
And His perfect will.

Is that a prayer you are willing to pray?

WHEN SURFACE FAITH IS NOT ENOUGH, IT MAY BE TIME TO HEAR OUR CALL. Verses 10–11 say, "*Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid, from now on you will catch men and women.' So when they had brought their boats to shore they left everything and followed him.*" They went from a career to a calling in the presence of Jesus.

I think one of the worst mistakes I ever made with the media was to describe a change of appointments as a career move. The comment came back to haunt me from both parishioners and colleagues. Not just paid Christians have callings, but all Christians have a calling. Do you have a career or a calling, a job or a mission?

A church member took a Ministry Discovery Workshop that I taught a few years

ago and discovered she had the spiritual gift and heart for hospitality. She focused that gift toward opening a Bed and Breakfast which thrives today. She turned a career into a calling.

Linda Clare who spends long hours as a day care provider says, “I wondered if there was more to life than baby sitting until a father came in to pick up his toddler one day and said, “I want to thank you for teaching Kasey how to pray. She says grace at home every night now and we are becoming used to it. We are now trying to find a church because Kasey is insisting.” Do you have a career or a calling?

Author and educator Howard Hendricks was on a plane one day that was delayed from takeoff. As passengers became irritated and demanding, Howard noticed how gracious one of the flight attendants continued to be with each passenger. When they were finally in the air he continued to be amazed at her poise and control. When she came by his seat, Howard asked if he could write a letter of commendation to the airline on her behalf. “I don’t work for the airline,” she replied, “I work for Jesus Christ. My husband and I prayed this morning that I would be a good representative of Jesus Christ on this flight.” Do you have a career or a calling?

You see, somewhere out on Lake Galilee, a handful of fishermen were transformed in such a way that they would eventually change the world because Christ had come and gave them a mission for eternity.

