

**Luke 5:1-11** <sup>1</sup> Once while Jesus was standing beside the Lake of Gennesaret and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, <sup>2</sup> he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> When he finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” <sup>5</sup> Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” <sup>6</sup> When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to burst. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’s knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” <sup>9</sup> For he and all who were with him were astounded at the catch of fish that they had taken, <sup>10</sup> including 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.” <sup>11</sup> And when they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Luke 5:1-11

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“The Courage to Go Deep”

Rev. Amy Terhune

It is Superbowl Sunday, so let’s talk football...just for a minute, not the whole sermon. The goal in any football game is to move the football 100 yards down the field into your opponents’ endzone for a touchdown. You get four chances to move that football a minimum of 10 yards. If you do that successfully, you get four more chances to move it another 10 yards, and so on, all the way down the field. If you don’t move it 10 yards in four tries, you have to give the ball to the other team.

You can move the ball by running it or passing it. Running is safest as far as keeping the ball. But your runner has to get past a big line of defensive players in order to run it 10 yards, which is why the runner usually winds up at the bottom of a huge pile of guys. Passing it is trickier. If you pass the ball, there’s always a chance that your receiver is going to miss it, or worse, that the other team is going to bat down or intercept it. Now, if you do a nice, targeted pass, your guy catches it, you get your 10 yards, and you start on your next set. But every now and then, one of your receivers will shake his defensive opponent long enough to run down field towards the end zone. It’s called “going deep”. And if you’re really lucky, your quarterback has enough time to set up in the pocket, and he throws it to just where the receiver is going to be – not too long so that he misses it, and not too short so that it gets intercepted by the defense that’s chasing him – but just right, and if the wind doesn’t blow it off course and if the defense isn’t in the way, and if your receiver actually catches it, they might just run it in for a touchdown, and the crowd goes nuts! A 60, 70, 80-yard pass – those are the ones that get replayed on the news all week long. But going deep is risky. 9 times out of 10, it doesn’t work.

But people still try it, because every now and then, it does work. Some of you might remember the game between the Michigan Wolverines and Colorado Buffaloes back in September of 1994 at Michigan Stadium. I was there and I remember. It’s indelibly etched in my brain. The Buffaloes were trailing us by 5 points with 6 second left on the clock. All we had to do was hold them for one final play. But their receiver went deep, and their quarterback launched a 70-yard Hail Mary pass, and lo and behold, their receiver caught it in the end zone, leaving the entire 100,000 fans in Michigan Stadium in

stunned, silent, shock as we lost the game in the last second by 1 point. You can google the incident. It's called "the Michigan Miracle" – a name obviously bestowed by Colorado fans.

Today, we're looking at another miracle that involves going deep. But I'm not talking football anymore. Now I'm talking fishing. Let's set the scene. In Luke 4, Jesus begins to preach around Galilee, and vs. 14 reports that word about him spread through the region. He performs several miracles in Capernaum—enough that the hometown crowd in Nazareth has heard about it and wants an encore. When he leaves Nazareth, he continues to roam the countryside preaching and begins to gather quite a crowd—enough of a crowd, in fact, that when chapter 5 opens, the crowd on the beach is so thick, it's pushing him out into the water. That's why he gets on a boat – Simon Peter's boat, to be precise.

Now the scripture doesn't tell us what Jesus is teaching, but I've got a theory, based on the events that follow. I think Jesus teaches that we need to risk going deep if we're going to have a relationship with God. I like how Rev. Lori Wagner explains this. She writes, "Going deep is not something most people feel comfortable doing. But the process of going "deep" captures the essence of both psychoanalysis and spiritual meditation, knowledge of self and knowledge of God. Truth. You can't hover on the surface of things and expect to be rewarded with either encounter or insight.

"Think of the way you did a research paper when you were in school. If you don't "go deep" into inquiry on your subject, you'll end up with 20 pages of "introduction."

"If you don't allow yourself to "go deep" in your relationships, you may have many acquaintances, but it may be harder to connect with a best friend or life partner because we can't risk showing the deepest parts of ourselves – the parts with warts and brokenness.

"If you don't allow yourself to "go deep" in the things that interest you, you'll never truly become immersed in the joy of that activity. Whether music, sports, dance, chess, or anything else, "going deep" allows you to truly embrace the experience, to embody it as your own, and to make it part of who you are.

"Think about how you introduce yourself. Most people, at least in their working years, introduce themselves according to their profession or career. Why? Because they've gone deep into what they do. What they do for a living is more than just a job. It's become a significant part of their core identity. If you don't much like your job, you may introduce yourself differently. Maybe your core identity lies in being a parent, a mentor, a volunteer, or a person of faith. The ways you are willing to "go deep" will define you." [5 ¶s from "Deep Water" by Lori Wagner, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).]

Jesus calls us to take a risk and "go deep" in faith. To sacrifice on behalf of God, to love our enemies, to give of ourselves, to donate generously, to care for those who are in trouble, to repent of our sin, to be open to change, to speak for the voiceless, to witness to the truth, and above all, to let God into our hearts, lives, minds, wallets, choices through prayer, discipline, and faithful living.

And because Jesus always tends to demonstrate what he teaches, he invites Peter to put out into deep water for a catch. Now, Peter might well have answered him, "Jesus, you may know God, but you don't know fishing. It is futile to try to catch fish in broad daylight. You stick to your business, and leave me to mine." But Peter didn't say that. You know he thought about it. "Lord, we've worked all night, and we haven't caught anything." You know he almost said out loud what everybody knows he had to be thinking. But he doesn't. Instead, he says, "Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."

"Max Anders, in his book titled GOD, writes about how, in the 1940 version of *The Mark of Zorro*, there is a remarkable "chase" scene in which Zorro is fleeing in the dead of night from a band of Spanish army officers. He is dressed in black, and his horse, of course, is jet black. Racing at breakneck speed through woods, over creeks, along narrow paths, Zorro is finally cornered on a bridge suspended about twenty feet over a river. In one of the most remarkable stunts Anders had ever seen in a movie, Zorro turns his horse toward the railing on the bridge, which is about four and a half feet high, and

spurs him. The horse jumps over the railing, into the river below, with the rider still on him. It swims downstream in a hail of bullets from the bridge, and once again, Zorro makes a cunning escape.

“Max Anders questioned how in the world did that stunt rider get that horse to jump over that railing into the black abyss below?...

“He learned the answer from those who train horses. The secret is that it takes time – years and years – to ensure the horse’s safety and build trust together. Obviously, this rider had spent a lot of time working with that horse, and a high degree of trust had developed. The horse never hesitated. Over the rail and into the river. Max Anders says that if you know anything about horses, it will almost bring tears to your eyes to imagine the years of work and trust that had to have gone into such a bold move. This is the story of our faith walk with Christ. Like those fishermen of old, we obey Christ in the little things. We learn that we can trust him and then, we give to him our all. [3 ¶s from Max Anders, GOD, (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995); adapted from “Show Me the Fish” by King Duncan, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).]

I know people, maybe some who are here this morning, whose lives are miserable, because for years they have refused to risk anything. They have resources but do not use them, skills but do not develop them, dreams but do not follow them, gifts but do not share them, ideas but do not disclose them, possessions but do not dedicate them—because they are afraid to do anything, give anything, risk anything, stand for anything, sacrifice for anything, or expect anything. So they sit quietly in the middle of their boat, in the shallow waters, and are dissatisfied, bored and wonder why nothing happens. [idea here adapted significantly from “When Your Nets Are Empty” by Charles H. Bayer, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).] Simon Peter put out into deep water, and God provided far more abundantly than he could have asked or imagined.

But the real change that happened that day wasn’t their luck. It was Peter himself. “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man.” Peter knows his scripture. He knows he’s seen something profoundly holy. He knows that Jesus has catapulted him right into the presence of God. And like Jacob and Moses and Jeremiah and Isaiah and countless others before him, he falls to his knees in recognition of his unholiness. But Jesus doesn’t let him stay on his knees. He says to him and to James and John—“don’t be afraid; from now on, you will be catching people.” And the story closes with a dramatic word. “When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.”

Now I’m going to make a confession to you. Fishing for people is not my favorite image for evangelism. Maybe it’s because my gut impulse is to analyze it a little too literally. After all, I know what happens when one goes fishing. I cast a line out into the water with bait on it. Some poor unsuspecting fish bites the lure and is reeled up out of the water—it’s natural habitat—to flop around in agony on the dock until all the life is gone from the thing. That’s a lousy model for evangelism, don’t you think?

But this is not what Jesus is about. He doesn’t want us to flop around until all the life is gone from us. He calls us out of our comfort zones to instill us with new life. And maybe that’s what happens for Peter, sitting there cleaning his nets, bored of the daily grind, thinking to himself that there’s got to be more to life than this. Jesus uses language we know. He invites our trust. He invites us to put out into deeper water, to go further, soar higher, love wider. And it is intimidating, which is why Peter falls to his knees. He senses that God is doing something. He senses his own smallness in the wake of a giant catch. He senses his own inadequacy when God provides so abundantly. He senses his own brokenness and sin in the presence of holiness. And yet, God calls him just the same. Somehow, some way, Jesus convinces Simon Peter that he can amount to more than what he has been; that he can be useful; that he can even change to world. The beginning of a life with Christ is the acknowledgement of our sin. But the continuation of our Christian life is an awareness of what we might yet be by the power of Christ. It takes courage to follow Jesus – to go deep, to admit our sin, to

let God use us in spite of it anyway. But we're called to follow. That's what Jesus asks of us. Follow me. Go deep. Teach what I have taught you. Serve as I have served you. Love as I have loved you. It's hard. It's risky. One of the things Rebekah Simon-Peter points out in her teaching for *Creating a Culture of Renewal* is that following Jesus, serving Jesus, embracing Jesus' dream for us and our ministry takes courage. Drawing on the life stories of great saints like Thomas Moore and Martin Luther and John Wesley and Rosa Parks and countless others, she points out that the call of Jesus to go deep will often scare the crap out of us. But going deep is precious. There's a peace in it despite the risk. There's a joy in it despite the suffering. There's an immersion in God that carries us when we go deep. Do you have the courage to Follow Jesus?

Let me close today with a story from Alexander Papaderos, who worked for many years trying to bring peace between the bitterly divided countries of Europe after WWII. His motivation for doing so stems from his childhood. He explains, "When I was a small child during the first world war, we were poor and lived in a remote village. One day, on the road, I found the broken pieces of a mirror. A German motorcycle had been wrecked in that place.... I kept the largest fragment.... By scratching it on a stone, I made it round and dull, so that it would not cut me. I began to play with it as a toy and became fascinated by the fact that I could reflect light into dark places where the sun would never shine – in deep holes and crevices and dark closets. It became a game for me to get light into the most inaccessible places I could find. I kept the little mirror, and as I grew, I would take it out in idle moments and continue the challenge of the game. In time, I came to understand that this was a metaphor for what I must do with my life. I came to understand that I am not the light or the source of light. The light [or truth] is there, and it will shine in many dark places only if I reflect it."

He concluded: "I am a fragment of a mirror whose whole design and shape I do not know. Nevertheless, with what I have, I can reflect light into the dark places of the world... and change some things in and for some people. Perhaps others may go and do likewise." [2 ¶s adapted from Robert Fulghum, "It Was on Fire When I Lay Down on It," New York: Villard Books, 1989; as used in "Eager For The Journey" by Brett Blair, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).]

Amen.