

Thinking about this scripture took me back to my days growing up on the beaches of Southern California. The beach is a wonderful place to sit and observe people and the mysterious ocean. Sooner or later I'm up dipping my toes into the waters, testing how cold it is. Then, I decide to venture out into the rolling waves to see if I'm strong enough to stand up to them. I go out further into deeper water and someone yells, "Hey, you're getting in over your head." On this day, I've gone far enough, and I head back to shore.

I'm comfortable sitting on the beach watching the beachgoers do their thing; watching the birds scamper along the shoreline; watching the surfers and other wave riders sailing along the waves as they roll in and crash down on unsuspecting adults and children, endlessly releasing their energy along the shoreline. I watch the boats out in the deeper waters and the fishermen patiently waiting for a catch.

As I watch I'm fascinated by the different people who come to the sea. I believe we all watch others and the way they approach life. Some people are bold – adventurous – unafraid – risk-takers – always moving forward – ahead of everyone else who's finding their way. Failure doesn't stop them. They get back on their surfboards and start all over. They are the ones who run and dive into the ocean no matter how cold it might be.

Some people are more deliberate – cautious – take in all the knowledge they can before they proceed. They are not necessarily fearful, they just prefer certainty over uncertainty. When they fail, they assess the lessons learned and either move forward, change direction or hold steady. They are the ones who take their time to get fully immersed in the ocean and the oncoming waves, but they will, it just takes them some time to do so.

Other people approach life in a fearful manner – taking little, tentative steps. They don't like change. They prefer things static. They run up to the receding waves along the shore, testing the waters and then run back away from the next wave that breaks in front of them. However we approach life, anyone of us can get caught up in deeper waters.

But, I've been thinking about the shoreline this week, less about the deep water. I prefer the safety of land. How do we approach the ocean of life experiences, life's endless waves buffeting our lives? Our scripture calls this body of water "Lake Gennesaret." It's also known as the Sea of Tiberias and the Sea of Galilee. It's that big to call it a 'sea'; thirteen miles long, eight miles across, 200 feet deep. Generally, it produced small waves that reached the shore, where the fishermen are mending their nets. It's peaceful here.

We might envision small sandpipers or seagulls with their pointy beaks stabbing the wet sand for food. These birds scamper up and down the

beach, running as fast as their little feet will carry them as the waves wash back out, searching, searching for food, for sustenance, for life. Then the next wave breaks on the shore, we see them scampering away to safety.

We might envision young children running in the waves along the shore, learning to test the water. We see them bowled over by a wave that was bigger and stronger than they had expected or could predict. The child, who's been knocked down, comes up a bit wary of life, crying, "What was that?" Even as we get older some of the early life lessons teach us to be careful, proceed with caution. Life is one challenge after another. We are always testing the waters, slowly getting used to something new, wanting to know fully what we are getting into before proceeding.

I hear clearly Jesus' words to Simon, "***Put out into the deep water***" and I know that that is also meant for me. Live here because this is where life resides. Don't be afraid! This is where you will be fulfilled. Out here you'll give yourself to others. This is where you will be encouraged to "catch men and women for Christ" – to give life, sustaining life to those in need. The word translated "catch" means "to take alive in the sense of rescuing from death." Catching men and women and children is about saving them!

What does it take for you and me to approach the deeper waters of life? Are we seeking safety or are we going to jump all in, as Jesus calls us to do? Are we going to get in deeper with our faith and learn to trust Jesus completely?

Luke's telling of this story is quite different from the gospels of Matthew and Mark. Mark and Matthew place this event early in the ministry of Jesus. In Luke, the call comes after Jesus' ministry in Nazareth where he's run out of town, an exorcism in a synagogue in Capernaum, healing Simon's mother-in-law, many healings and exorcisms in that city, preaching tours, and a growing popularity. The crowds are pressing against him, becoming larger and larger. Jesus' own success made helpers necessary. The crowds are so great that Jesus understands his ministry needs workers, followers, disciples to spread the Good News.

When we think our work is over and the day is done, then I'll wash my nets for the next day of fishing (we might wash dishes or clean up or whatever we do to prepare for tomorrow). It's just then, at that time, when we're ready to call it a day that Jesus calls us, "Let's try this again," says Jesus. ***"Put out into the deep water."*** Simon responds just like us, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything." We say, "I can't now. It's not the right time. I'm not ready. How can I trust you, Jesus?"

Here may be the hinge that opens this passage for you. Simon's response is, "But because you say so, I will let down the nets." Simon has changed his attitude of "I'm done for the day," to "whatever you say Master." Simon has changed from reluctant follower to a trusting disciple.

Simon has agreed to go further out into the waters, where it is deep and dark and unknown. We want that which is reliable and constant when we put out in the deep waters, when life throws us a curve, when the world we know is turned inside out and upside down? Just you and God! And that's Jesus' point – Come with me, rely on me, and your life will be anything but monotonous and predictable.

First Presbyterian Church of Wetumpka, Alabama was destroyed yesterday in a tornado. The building was destroyed, but not the people and not their faith. They have been called to put out into the deep water and Jesus is with them. And so are many others in that community.

You might be surprised at miracles in your life – Simon, James and John, the other partners in the other boat, and we assume Andrew is there as well – they are all surprised! What a catch! Never had they seen or caught so many fish. Simon is so shocked when he realizes the power of Jesus that he falls at his knees and says, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man."

This text is a gut check for me. I want to avoid it. The more I try to do just that, the more I'm challenged to trust Jesus at his word, "***Put out into the deep water.***" But, that's not where I naturally want to go, and Jesus knows that about us. Jesus knows that Simon and the others had fished all night and caught nothing. What is it in your life where you've given your whole being, your heart, soul, mind and strength, and you feel like you have nothing left to give, and it's then that you hear Jesus say, "***Put out into the deep water***"?

What does that mean for us today? I believe Jesus wants to fill every one of us with his grace, his love and compassion in such an abundance that it overflows, that you and I can't help but begin to share it with others.

Perhaps we, like Simon Peter, are afraid of the goodness, the vast amount of grace, forgiveness and the pure love of Jesus. We fall on our knees; we beg to be forgiven of our sins as we say, "I'm not worthy."

When Jesus tells Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men," he's speaking to us. It's as simple as that – and yet – not so simple. We must test the waters with Jesus as our instructor. We are called by Jesus to go out further in life, into the deep waters, that is where we will find those who need us – who need to be saved, caught and given new life.

Simon's skill as a fisherman is not the issue. His sin does not disqualify him as unworthy. Jesus calls Simon to the deep waters, to live and be in the presence of the Lord. It is the same power that caused him to fall on his knees that now lifts Simon into Jesus' service. – but not as a better fisherman; rather, as one who will be catching people. This is our calling, to catch, to save others, to give new life to those in need. Amen.