

Title: The Deep Waters
Text: Luke 5: 1 – 11
Date: February 10, 2018

If we think of the Bible as a library of the faith experiences of our spiritual ancestors, this passage would get plenty of traffic.

If we were to access the index in this library and look up the word “abundance,” it is likely that this passage would be referenced. After all, in this instance following Jesus led to an abundant catch of fish. We could easily imagine proponents of a “prosperity gospel” citing this passage.

If we were to access the index in this library and look up the word “calling,” it is likely that this passage would be referenced. There are many passages in the Bible that would be considered “call narratives,” and this would fit nicely into that category. Think about Moses (Exodus 6), and Gideon (Judges 6), and Isaiah (Isaiah). This describes the calling of the first disciples. Why were these particular people called?

If we were to access the index in this library and look up the word “discipleship,” it is likely that this passage would be referenced. Luke discusses the characteristics and costs of the first disciples. These are people who dropped everything, who left the life they knew so well, to follow Jesus.

If we were to access the index in this library and look up the word “evangelism,” it is likely that this passage would be referenced. After all, Jesus concludes this captivating account by saying to them, “**from now on you will be catching people.**” (5:10)

So many possible preaching directions. I guess I am reminded that what you find often depends upon where you start. What word in the index did you start with? I hope you have learned to expect that I’ll be taking the road less traveled – perhaps adding a word to the index.

Most scholars think that Luke didn’t set out to write a simple biography – even though he says he did – but he shaped the story of the Gospel and Acts to address circumstances in the church of his time. So I figure if Luke can take some liberties in shaping the story, then so can I! How would I shape the story for the pluralistic age in which we live?

If I could then invite you to follow the way my mind works, and to be responsive to the age in which we live, I would like us to look afresh at verse 4. There are allegorical treasures to be found when Jesus challenges Simon to, “**Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.**” I admit, however, that I’ll be exploring questions that did not occur to first century disciples.

My sense is that the church in general – alas, people in general – feel most at home in the shallow waters. The shallow waters are safe, and we like safe. We like to think that if we get knocked out of the boat for any reason, we can easily walk to shore. In my mind, the shallow waters also represent simple answers, and we like simple answers. We would just as soon be told what to believe, as to have to struggle with articulating something sensible on our own.

My conviction is that Jesus calls us into the deep waters. The deep waters are not safe. The deep waters represent the call to embrace mystery, rather than the allure of simple answers. Light does not penetrate the deep waters, and so it can be very disorienting. It can be so dark that you lose any sense of which way is “up.”

Reflecting on this, I think of the mystical classic written in the latter half of the 14th century entitled *The Cloud of Unknowing* which focuses on what is called the *via negativa* road to discovering God. This is quite the opposite of seeking simple answers. In chapter three we read: **“When you first begin [this work], you find only darkness, and as it were a cloud of unknowing. . . . Reconcile yourself to wait in the darkness as long as is necessary.”** This mindset is not natural for those who rush for simple answers, who rush for the light, but it is a special gift to finally understand the words of the Psalmist who says of God, **“even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.”** (Psalm 139:12)

This relates to my attraction to the field of Jungian psychology that I have mentioned from time to time. While we necessarily conduct the majority of our day to day life in the conscious world, Jung reminds us that the paramount call is to **“make the unconscious conscious.”** He goes so far as to say that **“the saving wholeness of the inner [being] cannot come about until all parts of the psyche have been made conscious.”** So then, here too we have the call to go deeper; from the conscious, to the unconscious, and ultimately to the collective unconscious.

Now I am sure some of you are worried that we are drifting into useless esoterica, but how we understand ourselves has every relevance to how we then relate to others. Jung goes on to say, **“That I feed the hungry, that I forgive an insult, that I love my enemy in the name of Christ - all these are undoubtedly great virtues. . . . But what if I should discover that the least among them all, the poorest of all the beggars, the most impudent of all the offenders, the very enemy himself - that these are within me, and that I myself stand in need of the alms of my own kindness - that I myself am the enemy who must be loved - what then? As a rule, the Christian's attitude is then reversed . . . We hide it from the world; we refuse to admit ever having met this least among the lowly in ourselves.”** But when we do come face to face with the beggar within, that makes all the difference in how we address the beggar on the street. It makes all the difference when dealing with a child grappling with addiction. There are indeed real world implications to going deep within.

Following Jesus' exhortation to go deep has real implications in this pluralistic world where we are increasingly coming face-to-face with people of other cultures and religions. I presume that you are all familiar with the term inter-faith dialogue. While this sounds like a weighty matter, in many respects this is often conducted in the shallow waters. Different concepts of divinity and salvation are dissected and compared as they are laid out on the table. This is done while drawing heavily on the resources of the intellect.

In contrast to inter-faith dialogue, there is a newer term that I suspect that many of you have not heard before: *interspirituality*. Interspirituality is the common ground, where all of the wisdom traditions meet. Interspirituality is committed to finding the spirituality both within and beyond religion – exploring our shared desire to connect with the Ground of Being. It is an exploration that respects differences, without seeking to convince or convert others.

I have periodically tipped you off regarding my love for Thomas Merton. While I don't believe the word interspirituality was popularized at that time, this was the path that this Trappist monk was on when he was conversing with Buddhist monks in Asia. Though coming from different theological frameworks, he was discovering that he spoke a more common language with deeply committed monks of other traditions, than with theologians in his own tradition.

It was Brother Wayne Teasdale who popularized the term interspiritual, and who issued the invitation to leave the shallow waters and go deeper. In 1999 he wrote his now classic book *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions*. He was heavily

influenced by Bede Griffiths, a founder of the *Christian Ashram Movement*, and shortly before his death in 2004 finished writing *Bede Griffiths: An Introduction to His Interspiritual Thought*.

Please don't misinterpret anything I am saying as a signal that I am abandoning my Christian roots. Far from it. I see all this as an expression of my desire to go deeper as I follow what I know as the living and universal Christ.

Furthermore, I see this all as consistent with the path that Shepherdstown Presbyterian is on. It is your bravery in looking deeper within that emboldens you to explore issues such as white privilege or gender identity. It is your adventuresome spirit that has led you to identify your faith and practice as being rooted in the way of Jesus, yet also enriched by wisdom from *all* sources.

Again, I know that for some of you this call to leave the shallow waters not only sounds scary, but leaves an unpleasant aftertaste of spiritual elitism. It is with you in mind that I share this quote from Ken Wilber: **"The spiritual journey always begins elitist and ends egalitarian. Always!"** I understand that the image of some people going deeper, and some people being left in the shallows, sounds like the establishment of a spiritual caste system. We must be on guard against that. Yet if we are successful in this journey, *it always ends egalitarian*. We go from the conscious, to the unconscious, to *the collective unconscious*. We go from a people focused on religious labels that separate us, to a people transfixed by the shared Spirit that unites us all.

Don't be afraid of the dark depths. Ken Wilber also says, **"It is not the forces of darkness but of shallowness that everywhere threatens the true, and the good, and the beautiful . . ."**

Amen.

Luke 5: 1 – 11 *Jesus Calls the First Disciples*

5 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.