

“Into the deep water”

- Growing up in the hot summers of Arkansas, our small town did not have a public pool
 - But we did have a private one where you could pay a small monthly fee, and have a place to go and swim
 - It was a little like a country club- but without golf, tennis, restaurants, pretty landscaping
 - It was just a concrete pool with a snack bar.
 - But it had a very cool twisty slide for the younger kids
 - It had two diving boards, one was the little regular one a couple of feet off the ground
 - But the other... the big diving board, seemed like a 100 feet tall- probably more like 15 feet, but it was
 - You climbed a vertical ladder to get to the top, and when you jumped, it was into a 13 foot deep end
 - Clearly this was in a different time with different legal liability standards... it would be harder to do this today
 - For a middle schooler who was looking at that high dive, there was a lot on the line
 - First and foremost, it was clear that the cool kids and the older kids could do it, so that was an automatic incentive.
 - Of course it was going to be fun- it's a high dive. Just watch all of those people jumping off laughing and screaming and having a great time
 - Canon balls, can openers, dives and belly flops- it must be amazing
 - Also, it was also terrifying.
 - The vertical climb alone was risky, once you got up there everyone in the pool was watching you, or at least it seemed
 - You had to be a strong enough swimmer to hold your breath while under water 13 foot down, and swim to the side once you
 - And then you had to actually jump.
 - There is a sense of abandonment the first time, of letting go, trusting, and then going again and again.
 - That, I think, is what it feels like to follow a calling from God.

- Today we are a little over halfway through the Epiphany season
 - And it is the time that we get to see some of the high points of Jesus' ministry and his calling
 - Jesus launches his ministry as the Son of Man and also the Son of God as he is baptized
 - He returns to his hometown, and is rejected there, almost run off a cliff, but it doesn't stop him- he rises above it
 - He is getting very popular with the common people, as he travels and teaches about God's love for all
 - About how the worthless in the world are not worthless at all, but beloved and perhaps favored by God
 - He heals, he promises forgiveness for the repentant, and a chance to start again for the captives
 - His message is philosophical, spiritual, political, economical- it's everything,
 - Because every aspect of life has told these people they are nothing
 - They have almost nothing, living from day to day, and the society in which they live offer them little hope of advancement
 - But Jesus says, you are beloved children of God,
 - And all you have to do to believe and live into the Kingdom of God that is breaking through right here and right now, right around the corner.
 - And that is a powerful message of hope for many, and no doubt threatening for others
 - The crowds are growing to the point that they are unruly, no doubt some wanting a closeup view of a miracle
 - Some wanting healing, some wanting enlightenment
 - The crowd has cornered Jesus at the lake, back to the water, and Jesus decides he had better get on a boat soon
- There are fishermen on the shores, they are cleaning and mending their nets
 - Likely after a fishing expedition overnight.
 - We do not know for sure, but fishermen would clean their nets *After* they finished fishing for the day
 - I think we can assume they had tried all night, caught little, were tired and disappointed
 - And were ready to go home to their families and sleep a bit.
 - Jesus asks to borrow a boat, and they let him, and as sound can travel so well over water, it creates an informal amphitheater.

- Then comes the fun part- Jesus is borrowing their boat, clearly not a fishermen himself
- And he decides to offer some helpful advice to a frustrated group of professional fishermen
- He says, cast your nets out a little farther... I grew up on that song
- Go out into the deeper water and try again
- The miracle happens, the nets fill up with so many fish they are straining
- Additional boats are called over to help
- It's almost too much for the boat to carry
 - These boats are not small
 - They were about 26.5 feet long, 7.5 feet side, and 4.5 feet deep¹
 - That's a lot of fish- the haul of a lifetime
 - Perhaps a whole week or more of income
- And they were afraid because of what this miracle meant about this man standing before them
- Jesus says, Do not be afraid, come with me, and you will be catching people
- Come with me out into the deep water of the soul
- Nevermind that you are not qualified, never mind that it seems ridiculous, never mind that without God you would never succeed in this
- Come with God into something deeper
- And they left the fish, the economic boom², the approval from their dad, the version of success of the life they were currently living
- They left it and followed Jesus.
- There's is not the only call story today, and to just briefly mention Isaiah who is called before God's throne in a vision
 - And he, much like Peter, knows he is not worthy of this
 - And yet like Peter, James and John, God still calls him weaknesses and inadequacies all
 - Calls Isaiah to a much greater purpose
 - The scene is a little funny, once you get over the sheer transcendence of looking at God's full majesty, and feeling very small
 - And after touching the hot coal to Isaiah's lips, purifying and him and making him worthy of this moment

¹ Sermon Seeds Year C, Kindle edition, Location 1274

² PulpitFiction Year C Epiphany 5, <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/epiphany5c>

- God looks around a room that only has one human in it, and that's Isaiah
- And asks the heavenly hosts, "Who will go for us?"
- Isaiah is so overcome you can see him saying, Here I am, Send me! before he even knows what he has signed up for
- And the calling is not an easy one
- Into deep water Isaiah goes, delivering a message to Israel that they are not going to like, or even hear
- Now over the last week or two, we have been talking a lot about God calling the church
 - Particularly around the annual meeting, and God does call churches
 - But this morning I want to talk about God's call for you and me, as individuals
 - And it is not unlike these we see here this morning
 - God says to us, go out into the deep water.
 - The murky water, the risky water, the water of being more deeply connected to God's purpose for us
 - The water of deeper connection to each other that brings vulnerability and authenticity, and deeper connection to each other
 - And the deeper water of purpose in God's Kingdom
 - Now you cannot talk to a priest about calling, and not hear about a calling to ordained ministry
 - It may be that some of you feel that, because sometimes God calls us into a whole different way of leading and being
 - But for most, God's call into the deep water happens right where you are
 - It is a call into a deeper relationship with God, with yourself, and with the people you are related to and work with
 - Rather than going somewhere else, or being something new, It is a call to bring God's Kingdom to where you are now
 - Whether you are a banker, a sales person, a business exec, admin, accountant, a teacher, doctor, lawyer
 - Whether you are unemployed, under employed, or even retired.
 - There are deeper waters everywhere.
 - We are called to begin living with these new sets of values and priorities that defy the world in which we live,
 - just like it did for Jesus and the disciples
 - Holding onto values that say no one is worthless, everyone matters, especially those whom the world says are nothing
 - Those whom everyone else is using as scapegoats

- Those who are down, and out, and sometimes even kicked again
- It is about living a life that forgives when you have every right to get revenge.
- It is about living a life that loves and prayers for enemies and friends alike
- A life where our thoughts and actions are not only considered through a lens of what benefits “number 1”
- But where others matter just as much
- This is swimming in the deep end, jumping off the high dive head first
- God is still asking, who will go for us?
- How is God calling you today?
- Because there is always deeper water, new water in which to swim
- There is always an opportunity to grow closer to God, to reexamine our life
- To decide to drop the pretenses and to live more fully, more at peace, and more and more interconnected to God and each other
- Jesus is still saying, follow me, go out into the deep water.

Amen.