

“Where is that deep water, Jesus, and are there jellyfish in it?”

- Hi, my name is Jesse, and I am afraid of jelly fish.
- It's true, and you all know how much I love the ocean- the wind and the waves and the peacefulness there
- But there are also jelly fish in the ocean, aren't there?
- And this has caused me much strife through the years, especially when I was younger
- It started because when I was a kid on a vacation with my parents, a jelly fish mistook me for a fish and wrapped my arm
- We were out pretty far on a sandbar, so the water was not deep really, but it was pretty far away from the shore
- I felt a little itch on my leg, just a tingle, and I reached down to scratch it, or shoo the little fish away
- And BAAM, this jellyfish that I never even saw wrapped my arm and quickly let go before I could even react
- I have never felt that much pain, fear, or panic
- The inconsolable little Jesse ran towards the beach irrationally screaming and refusing to stop as my dad tried to catch up
- There was so much of the poison in my system that I was nauseous after waking up from my Benadryl nap later that day
- That sucker left little dots in lines starting at my wrist in a clump, and going up past my elbow
- Something like that leaves an impression. I refused to go out into the ocean that year past ankles
- And in the years to come, it was my waist
- My fear and memory of that day stayed with well into adulthood, and stopped me from doing some cool things in my youth, like snorkeling
- I just couldn't do it- what would happen if there were jelly fish around me and I couldn't get away???
- There was one family vacation after that instead of going out into the deep water with the family and my snorkel, I stayed on the beach alone
 - Until finally getting up my courage, and swimming out to catch up
 - And it was beautiful

- And to this day, although rarely is there any panic about it, should I see a jelly fish washed up on the sand, or purple flags flying
- You can bet I am happy just sitting under the umbrella, just in case
- This Sunday we are a little over halfway through the Epiphany season, or season after Epiphany if you prefer
- And it is the time that we get to see some of the high points of Jesus' ministry and his calling, with the hopes that we start to believe
- That we start to believe more deeply in this man named Jesus
- Jesus launches his ministry at his baptism in the Jordan by John, goes to the wilderness to face his temptations
- He returns to his hometown, and is rejected there, almost run off a cliff like we discussed last week, but it doesn't stop him
- He is getting very popular with the common people now, 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 because they need it
- 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
 - Maybe some are just bored and thought this was a nice distraction
- 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 they were ready to go home to their families and sleep a bit.
- Does anyone here know what tired feels like after a long day?
- I feel like the added stress of our world today means that we are all pulling from our reserves a lot lately
- 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 fisherman himself
- And he decides to offer some helpful advice to a frustrated group of professional fishermen
- I am sure they are looking at him with that, you gotta be kidding look, but the crowd is there, so what's a tired fisherman to do?
- Jesus says, cast your nets out a little farther... I grew up on that song
- Go out into the deep 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
- Never mind 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.

¹ Sermon Seeds Year C, Kindle edition, Location 1274

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

- The miracle of them following that call rivals the miracle of the fish in the nets, in my opinion
- 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 humorous, 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
 - 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 listen to
 - Jelly fish everywhere.
- You know, for a preacher, these readings are golden
 - It is not hard to tease out a sermon here- the readings are full, colorful, and memorable
 - But oh do they run deep
 - The easy part: Jesus is still calling. And calling you and me and St. Michael's to cast our nets out a little farther
 - God still asks, "Who will go for us?" and we standing right there, exposed, like Isaiah
 - Jesus still offers us an invitation into the deep water of life, and waits on us hoping we will accept
 - I think that might look slightly different for each of us, but if I were to try describe the deep water of abundant life
 - I might say that what Jesus offers us is in contrast to the shallow, the mundane, the daily grind, the superficial
 - It is a connection to some bigger purpose, identity, and value
 - It is an alternative to the number-driving world in which we must live- something else besides how many likes and views and friends you have

- Or how much money you make, or how many extra curricular activities your kids are on
- All of that is still there, and necessary, it's normal life... but it no longer defines us, nor captivates us
- We get a peek at it when the fishermen here follow Jesus and become disciples
- They walk off and leave a lot of money behind in those nets, a lot of security for their families
- As they followed Jesus into deeper waters, and suddenly all that was less important, it did not sparkle quite as much
- Jesus is calling you and me to something more and more meaningful than anything the world can offer
- The baptismal font back there is deeper than it appears (and maybe one day we can fill it back up with water!)
- But more than God calling us, which is definitely a truth found here this morning
- We also ask: what holds us back, what are our jelly fish of the soul that keep our feet planted in ankle deep water?
- Now that is the real question for me today, for us- what stops us?
- Each of us must wrestle with that question for our whole lives- what scares us, or what tempts us to stay on the shore?
- Have we been hurt, or are we angry? Or does something tempt us, or are we comfortable?
- God has more in mind for us.
- A meaningful, spiritual life answering that call with, "Here am I lord, send me," is the great task before us
- And finally, I would offer one last thought on our readings here: it is not a solo journey
- When the fish filled the nets to the point of breaking, the disciples motioned to their friends to come and help
- That is exactly why you and I are here- for our own journey into the deep waters, and to hold hands with others as we all take another step
- That's a church.
- God still asks, who can we send?
 - Jesus still beckons us into deeper waters
 - "Here am I Lord, send me."
 - Out of the way, jelly fish.

Amen.