

A mother was out walking with her 5-year-old daughter. She picked up something off the ground and started to put it into her mouth. The mom took the thing away and asked her not to do that. "Why?" she asked. "Because it's been on the ground, and you don't know where it's been. It's dirty. And it probably has germs."

At this point, her daughter looked at her with absolute admiration and asked, "Mom, how do you know all this stuff? You are so smart!" The mom thought quickly and replied, "All moms know this stuff. It's on the Mom Test. You have to know it, or they don't let you be a Mom." They walked along in silence for a couple of minutes, and the daughter was obviously processing this new information. "Oh, I get it!" she beamed, "So if you don't pass the test, you have to be the dad." "Exactly," said mom.

First, some background on the gospel. Lake Gennesaret is simply another name for the Lake of Galilee, especially in this particular area of the lake. Scholars have identified several places near the shore of the lake that provided sufficient distance for Jesus' voice to carry because of a natural amplification due to its topography. One such cove was near Capernaum, where Jesus was headquartered. Immediately preceding this passage Jesus was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum, and then healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law in that same town.

The fishermen tended to work at night – both to avoid the heat of the sun, and because many fish stayed in the depths to avoid the sun as well. They used 2 different types of nets – in shallow water, a circular net of mesh – about 15 feet wide – was cast into the water. It had lead sinkers that pulled most of the net down so it did not all float, and once it had trapped fish, it could be hauled in. In deeper water, the fishermen used a dragnet. The detail about the nets beginning to break is significant because the fishermen would have to repair ruptured nets before they could fish again; for those with less means, sometimes this even required a loan. We are told that Simon signaled to his partners to help with the sinking boat – sometimes commercial fishermen partnered together in a cooperative. The fact that Simon protests that he is a sinful man is a common motif in many call stories in the Bible – in the presence of the pure light of God, we are forced to recognize our inner darkness. And finally, they 'left everything.' Many believe that commercial fishermen, although not elite, were usually better off economically than the peasants who comprised the majority of Galileans. Peasants' work was also more seasonal than that of fishermen. Leaving behind the fishing business was an economic sacrifice. (CULTURAL STUDY BIBLE, p. 1768-1769)

Second, so what do we do with this? God is forever calling people to follow Him, down to this very day, and in this very church. And it is always a call to a remarkable life – a full life, a life rich in love and goodness. But we have to be willing to take a leap of faith and trust Him. But the reality is that many of us would rather cling to a life of safety than leap to a life of significance. But once in a while, someone says yes. And then they stand in a long line of disciples who were willing to allow God to alter the trajectory of their lives.

Now we might tend to think that the call of God would come to us most clearly when we are on spiritual pilgrimage, or after a retreat in a monastery. And indeed, God can and does speak to us in such intentional silence and away from the distractions of our often rushed and self-centered world. But remarkably, God also calls us in places and moments when we would think the Divine 'signal strength' would have very few bars, places in our lives where God should have heard a busy signal when He tried to call us. And yet, it was in just those ordinary moments, while they were just going about their ordinary lives, God called on the life of Isaiah, Peter, and Paul, all featured in our readings today.

True Isaiah was in the Temple, but Isaiah did not come to the Temple that day to receive a call from God. Isaiah was consumed with grief over the recent death of King Uzziah, who had reigned over Judah for 52 years. Isaiah was worried about the future, about issues of economy and national security. But while he mulled all of this over, God interrupted his daydreaming during the worship service and called him to a vision of a new future with a new vocation of prophet. So if your mind has just been wandering during this homily, thinking about balance sheets, or whether to bet on the Rams or the Bengals, or to-do lists, you are in good company. Isaiah was sitting just where you are sitting right now when God called him.

Likewise, Peter was just coming to shore in the morning after a long fruitless night of fishing. Peter just wanted to go to sleep, or maybe drown his sorrow and worry at Lake Gennesaret's Brewprint Pub. (Full disclosure – I have enjoyed Brewprint's beer, but I received no pay for this endorsement!) But this interruption of his ordinary life was the beginning of St. Peter's extraordinary life.

St. Paul was just doing his job as a zealous, self-righteous, brilliant, type-A driven man out to kill some Christians -- for the sake of religion, mind you -- when God pushed him to the ground and told him to stop persecuting HIM, Jesus. The call of God comes to ordinary people, and often during very ordinary moments. (Adapted from GRACEWORKS, 6 Feb 2022, p. 21-22)

And third, God transforms those He calls, if they are faithful to the call. And that means we have to 'put out into the deep.' The psalmist says "My soul clings to you, your right hand holds me fast." A soul with depth -- a soul centered on God always knows it has a heavenly Father who will hold its pain, its fear, its anxiety. This is the spiritual life: to place ourselves each moment in the presence and care of God. This is a difficult thing to do. We hold on tightly, but often to the wrong things -- money, stuff, the corporate ladder, looks, prestige -- rather than God. But staying centered on God -- His word, His ways -- is the essence of life for the soul. Thomas Kelly wrote: "We feel honestly the pull of many obligations and try to fulfill them all. And we are unhappy, uneasy, strained, oppressed, and fearful we shall be shallow.....We often have 'measured out our lives with coffee spoons' as T.S. Eliot famously said. And if we don't pray, we can end up with a life with all the depth of a teaspoon. But we have hints that there is a way of life vastly richer and deeper than all this hurried existence, a life of unhurried serenity -- even peace. If only we could slip over into that Center!we have seen and known some people who have found this deep Center of living, where the fretful calls of life are integrated, where NO as well as YES can be said with confidence.

"My soul clings to You; your right hand holds me fast." We can bring these words to mind when God seems distant. Brother Lawrence called this "practicing the presence" of God, and the most important part of that practice lay in "renouncing, once and for all, whatever does not lead to God."

A very simple way to guard our soul from shallow living is to ask: "Will this situation block my connection to God?" As we begin to live this question, we find how little power the world has over us. What if I don't get a promotion, or my boss doesn't like me, or I have financial problems, or I have a bad hair day? First world problems! Yes, these may cause disappointment, but do they have any power over our soul? Can they nudge our soul from its center, which is the very heart of God? When we think about it this way, we realize that external circumstances cannot keep us from being with God. If anything, they draw us closer to Him. (adapted from John Ortberg, SOUL KEEPING, p. 104-105)

A story to conclude about someone who is trying to "put out into the deep." Stacie Marshall is in line to inherit her family's 300-acre farm in Georgia, land her family has worked for more than 200 years. She has big plans for the commercial cattle operation and fields she's renamed Mountain Mama Farms -- her business plan calls for selling grass-fed beef and handmade products like goat's milk soap.

But a recent discovery changed not only Stacie's plans but her life. Her family had been slaveowners. While cleaning out the family farmhouse, Stacie found a dusty boot box filled with old papers. Inside she found the county slave schedule from 1860. 7 slaves were listed under the name W.D. Scoggins, Stacie's great-great-great grandfather.

Stacie also found another unsettling part of the Scoggin's legacy: W.D. Scoggins acquired the family's first tract of land in an 1833 lottery that gave land seized from Creek and Cherokee tribes to white farmers.

That began a difficult conversation between Stacie and her family. She's diving into her family's past determined to chip away at racism in the South, where so many White families with roots here benefited from slavery and almost every Black family had enslaved ancestors.

With help and advice from minority farmers in town, Stacie is looking at setting up an internship for young Black farmers, letting them work her land and keeping the profit. She also wants to preserve the town's Black church's cemetery. And maybe - - and this is where the discussion gets complicated with her family and White neighbors - give some of the family's land or profits from its sale to the descendants of the Black sharecroppers who helped her family build the value of their property. She's begun a genealogical search for the descendants of a Black woman named Hester, a slave who cared for W.D. Scoggins' children and grandchildren 200 years ago.

It's going to be a difficult, heart-wrenching undertaking, but Stacie Marshall says she is committed to finding a way "to make this right." "I don't have a lot of money, but I have property. How am I going to use that for the greater good, the common good, and not in like a paying-penance sort of way but in an it's just-the-right-thing-to-do-kind of way?" (slightly adapted from NY TIMES, July 7, 2021)

That's a wade into deep water. It comes with the call which we were all given in baptism. Are we open to doing the same? "Put out into the deep." AMEN.