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Title: Go Deeper

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Scripture: [Isaiah 6:1-11](#)

Text: [Luke 5:1-11](#)

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The crowd was so large, so excited, so into the moment that they were pressing in. Someone said, "Jesus, are you OK?" and "Stay tight, all right?"¹

Can you see it? Many of you did. The quote isn't found in between verses in the gospel but rather, comes from a chaotic scene at the end of Super Bowl

53. After the Patriots ran out the final seconds of their 13-3 win, CBS sideline reporter Tracy Wolfson ran out to Tom Brady for the post-game interview. However, Wolfson wasn't the only one who wanted to talk to the winning quarterback. Amid the crush of media, players, and NFL officials, Brady struggled through the crowd to embrace opposing players, Super Bowl MVP Julian Edelman, coach Bill Belichick, and Patriots owner Robert Kraft. The 5'6" Wolfson was in the middle of them.

Millions of viewers across the world watched and some were genuinely afraid. Kevin Simkins, an NFL Films cameraman told the LA Times that he "was bouncing around like a piece of popcorn" in the pack of people. He actually felt his feet lift off the ground. Twitter erupted with both concern and admiration at Tracy Wolfson's determination.² She finally got her interview, waiting patiently for it all while the crowd was pressing in on her.

So begins our story, not with concern for whether or not Jesus is okay. But with a crowd, nevertheless pressing in on him. Jesus' popularity has grown to that of an MVP.

The reporter is not Tracy Wolfson, but rather Luke. He says "Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God..."(Luke 5:1) Gennesaret is Luke's name for the Sea of Galilee. The "pressing in on him" was the result of the reports of Jesus' power. When he heals a man with an unclean Spirit

in the synagogue at Capernaum, word spreads quickly through the region. One block from that synagogue was the home of Simon Peter. He goes there, heals Peter's mother-in-law, spends the evening laying hands on of those were sick. Then, he spends the night in Simon's home. For the days if not weeks, he continues teaching in the synagogues in Judea and his popularity grows. Now a crowd following was pressing in on him. Jesus sees two boats and the fisherman out in them, washing their nets. So Jesus "...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." (Luke 5:1b-3)

I never wanted to preach from a boat until I visited Duc in Altum last fall, an archeological site of a synagogue at Magdala. It was discovered in 2009 and is currently the oldest synagogue excavated in Galilee. A coin minted in 29 AD was found inside the synagogue, proving that the synagogue was from the first century and the time of Jesus' ministry. It is highly likely that it is one



of the synagogues where Jesus taught. A few hundred feet from the archeological site of the synagogue is a chapel commemorating this story from Luke. It has a dramatic view of the Sea of Galilee and a boat altar and pulpit blessed by Pope Francis in 2014. I wanted to stand behind that pulpit and preach.

Jesus doesn't stand; he sits. We have an accurate understanding of exactly what kind of boat Jesus was in. Two miles from the synagogue at Magdala, a fishing boat was discovered, uncovered during a severe drought during the '80s. It was buried in mud. After years of careful restoration, the boat is now on display in a museum. It is dubbed "the Jesus boat" because it too dates from the time Jesus' ministry.³ It measures 25.5 ft by 7.5 ft., had a crew of five and a limit of 2,000 pounds. That's important to remember.

Jesus gets in Simon's boat to teach and this is not by accident. Luke is careful in his reporting and as pointed out earlier, he has already placed Jesus in Simon's home. They know each other. That might stretch your imagination given what we learn in Sunday school as children. Jesus walks down the beach, sees Peter and Andrew and out of the blue, calls them into ministry. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." (Mark 1: 17) They appear to be absolute strangers, captivated by Jesus' hypnotic eyes and charismatic call. "And immediately they left their nets and followed him." (Mark 1: 18) Jesus is a Pied Piper Messiah and his

disciples are like mice following him down the beach. If you only read Matthew or Mark's version of the story, you can come to that conclusion. But it isn't how it's how Luke tells the story.

Luke reveals that Simon Peter and Jesus knew each other and have a previous relationship, a close enough friendship that Simon hosted Jesus in his home on at least one occasion. Jesus was developing relationships, developing a following before he says, "Follow me." Simon Peter, James, and John are some of those relationships. Jesus is aware of their fishing business and they are aware of his power. They've heard him preach. They've seen miracles outside Simon's home in Capernaum. It is why Jesus can so easily commandeer Simon Peter's boat when the crowds are pressing in on him.

It is also why Simon responds to Jesus with the title Master. It comes when Jesus "...had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master..." (Luke 5:4-5a) And I think he gives Jesus a look. Here's is a guy who grew up in his father's workshop in Nazareth, a teacher and a preacher, even a miracle worker, impressive. Worth calling Master. But as far as we know, as far as Simon knows, Jesus, with no experience fishing, tells a member of the very successful Zebedee Fishing Company how to catch fish. They have been fishing all night which is the time to fish, in the shallow water where fish are usually found and now they are enduring that painful question that people always pose to fishermen. "Did you catching anything?" and the answer is "No!" "...we have worked all night long but have caught nothing" (Luke 5:5a) "Go out into the deep water," says Jesus, "trust me and see what happens. It is an interesting point in the story and one which I wonder what was going through Peter's head. Peter says, "Yet if you say so." (Luke 5:5b) He puts out into deep waters where he finds abundance beyond his imagination. It wasn't just a matter of a lot of fish after a night when there were no fish. It was a catch so fantastic that it threatened to swamp the boat, more than 2000 pounds, so enormous that it didn't make sense. Things like this just don't happen. It was so overwhelming, so powerful, that Simon instantly knows that Jesus isn't just somebody to have over to the house for a sleepover. He's more than miracle worker who can heal a few folks at the synagogue. He is not just a master. He is *the* master and like Isaiah, seeing the Lord sitting on the throne, "...he fell at Jesus' knees and said,... (and like Isaiah, he exclaimed, "Woe is me I am a man of unclean lips..." (Isaiah 6:5)... "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5: 8) But of course, Jesus doesn't. Instead, "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." (Luke 5:10-11)

I know that you might think that this is the important part of the story and in a way it is. Jesus' movement had grown to the point where he needed a team before he could go any further. Calling disciples was critical and of course, so was catching people. It still is. The cause of Jesus Christ still needs disciples and evangelists, people that need to find the lost, invite friends, and discover those in the community who are searching but not in the right places and certainly not in a place called church.

But maybe, just maybe, this story today has something to say about where we are-- because a lot of us, I think, are reluctant to leave the shallows. There is a risk of leaving and Peter senses it, knows it and knows somehow that it isn't even about fish. He knows that once he takes the risk of leaving the shallow places behind—shallow places in his work, shallow places in his relationships with others, to himself and to God — and dares to go just a little bit deeper, things are going to be different for him and for anyone who is around him.

I think we are all just like Simon. We resist God's call of going deeper and say things like Simon said to Jesus. I have fished those waters already. I have tried to pray. I have tried to study. I have tried to become a servant like you, Jesus. I have tried to live out my faith in a way that would please you, Jesus. And I have come up empty every single time. I am just tired. I'm tired of fishing those same waters. There is nothing out there in the depths for me."

It's just another way of offering up all of those excuses that come so easily. I'm too busy. I'm too old. I'm too young. I don't know enough. I'm not faithful enough. Not now, maybe later. It doesn't work for me. I'm not feeling it. I have tried everything that you have asked me to do, and it doesn't work.

The end result is, "it doesn't work." A faith life in the shallows simply leads to shallow people and shallow churches. Over two decades ago, a college of mine once wrote. "At no time in the history of the Christian church has the danger of shallow faith been more pressing. The passionate call of Christ is often trivialized into an invitation to join a religious club that meets for coffee and entertainment on Sundays."⁴ Oddly, it was prophetic as worship attendance, missional support and spiritual engagement have declined by more than 50% in the last 20 years. There is a reason. When the church is a clubhouse, a gathering of like-minded people who enjoy fellowship, share common values, the church is at risk. But to the extent that a congregation is determined to be a lighthouse in its community, offering hope, providing rescue, protecting the vulnerable, and bringing people to a life-altering

relationship with Jesus, the church will flourish.⁵ That only happens when you and I are willing to go deeper.

I don't mean to be pressing in on you, particularly since you don't have anywhere to go. There aren't any empty boats lying around, even though we've needed them this week. But just where are you? Are you choosing to skim the surface of faith, take a little here and there, come to church occasionally and check the box of our religion to do list? If so, you are content to live a faith life in the shallows

Or are you searching for something more than this? Something deep and life-changing; an encounter with holiness and significance. Deep down inside, I think most of us are searching for something more. You want a vital relationship with Jesus that makes a difference in your life and the lives of those around you.

Then, put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch. That's what Jesus is saying to us. Our lesson is not about human accomplishment but rather about what God can do through us. We are not told to work harder, to pray more earnestly, or to give sacrificially even if, in many ways, those things would help. The story of the magnificent catch of fish and the call of the disciples is not a command to get busy. No, this lesson is about mindset rather than an assignment, it is about transformation. It tells us what God can do in and through us when we simply make ourselves available, if we respond to Jesus' invitation to go deeper. Will you? Can you? Have you?

If you do, if we do, we will talk to others about Jesus, bless those who visit our church, enrich the lives of those who seek us, love and teach their child, encourage the spiritually hungry and support people at significant moments in their lives. When that happens, we will be catching people, not because of what we do, but of who we are.

¹ <https://www.bostonglobe.com/sports/patriots/2019/02/04/tracy-wolfson-her-post-super-bowl-interview-with-tom-brady-was-definitely-struggle/9ZzX7NDoQE0nkZ4fo8XQgI/story.html>

² <https://www.wisn.com/article/twitter-erupts-as-reporter-tries-to-interview-tom-brady-after-super-bowl/26126674>

³ <http://www.jesusboatmuseum.com/Biblical%20Background>

⁴ Thomas G. Long, Matthew, Westminster Bible Companion, Westminster John Knox Press, 1997. p. 182.

⁵ Sermon preached by the Rev. Roy Almquist at all services February 13 & 14, 2010, The Transfiguration of Our Lord