

In the Deep Water
Luke 5:1-11
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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On December 26, 2018 Portland, Oregon resident Colin O’Brady became the first person to ever complete a solo trek across the land mass of Antarctica. Braving even days with 60 mile an hour winds and 80 degree below zero temperatures, he continued. Pulling his sled full of supplies that at the beginning weighed 375 pounds, he carried on. Walking 12 and 13 hours a day, he persisted. And in one final push of 32 ½ hours straight, he completed this never before accomplished task just two days before another solo hiker, former British army captain, Lou Rudd.

O’Brady was motivated by his identity as an endurance athlete. He was motivated by his sense of adventure. He was motivated by a desire to return home to his wife, his friends, his family. But even with all that, it did not make every day easy. In fact, in an interview with Rachel Martin on NPR’s Morning Edition he played a piece of tape from during his trek where he said, “I’m kind of down in my mind right now. This is - even though I’m so close, day 48, this is the first time in the project I’m feeling like I just wish I could quit. I’m not doing good but trying to hold it together.” It wasn’t easy. But he was determined. And he believed the risk was worth it so he dove in, fully committed to a seemingly impossible task.¹

There are Colin O’Bradys in this world. And then there are the rest of us. There are people like me and, I suspect, like many of you who are happy to play it safe...to stick to what we know...to take only measured risks that would be approved by an actuary.

¹ <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/30/689863655/obradys-is-first-to-complete-solo-unassisted-trek-across-antarctica>

But what happens when it is Jesus who asks us to try something new, to take a risk, to head into the deep waters?

Because, in this morning's story that's what happened.

Jesus had begun his public ministry. He had been out teaching and healing. He had started to gain recognition and crowds started to gather when he was around. And this day was no different. In fact, the crowds were so big that he took position offshore. He asked Simon, not yet a disciple but already someone he knew, to push his boat out from shore a bit. It gave Jesus not only a place from which to teach but a little space from the crowd.

But when he finished teaching, he did not ask Simon to take him back to shore as might have been expected, and as Simon might have wanted. After all, remember, Simon and his friends had just come in from fishing. They had been fishing all night. They were in the process of cleaning their nets. They were likely ready to go home, to see the family, to get a little rest when Jesus showed up. But instead of thanking Simon and going on his way, Jesus said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."²

Did you notice what the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible says about Simon's response? It reads, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets."³ It is so kind and so sanitized.

But I suspect, whether he said it aloud or not, Simon's response, at least in his head, was a little more like, "You've got to be kidding me! I've been fishing all night. I was just cleaning up. *I* am the fisherman – remember *you* are a carpenter's son. But you want to tell me where to fish and when to fish? You don't think that I am doing my best?" Can't you almost hear those words on Simon's tongue? And yet, perhaps his very next thought was to realize that because he

² Luke 11:4, NRSV.

³ Luke 11:5, NRSV.

was exhausted and just ready to be done, it actually was easier to go along with Jesus, to throw the nets in one more time, than it was to argue with him. And so, Simon, we are told, did just that.

And what a surprise he got! Jesus really did know what he was talking about. The nets were soon full and Simon was calling to the others to come help.

But the story doesn't end there. See it doesn't seem to really just be about a bountiful catch. It doesn't seem to just be about a miracle of many fish where none had been just hours earlier. But, Jesus says to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now you will be catching people."⁴ And then the story seems to be about something much more...about trusting Jesus enough to risk their lives to follow him and to share in ministry with him.

See, often we only use the word risk when we think about doing things that come with physical risk – things like bungee jumping or like Colin O'Brady's trek across Antarctica. And we often sanitize the expectations of our faith so much that we don't think of it as risky at all.

But if we are listening to the stories of Jesus, and if we are willing to be honest - even when it is hard – then we can't help but notice that risk is part of our calling.

After all, if we pay attention, following Jesus is about risk. It is about risking our way for the way of another. It is about risking our stuff and choosing to share. It is about risking our hearts as we open them even to people who are very different from us. It is about risking control as we commit our lives to reflect God's light.

So, what would happen if we really lived into the risk that is the call of our faith? What would happen if we quit playing it safe? What would happen if we quit only helping those who we could prove needed exactly the help they asked for? What would happen if we quit only

⁴ Luke 5:10, NRSV.

reading the passages of scripture that support what we already believe? What would happen if we listened honestly to Jesus' call to love beyond reason? What would happen if our attachment to Jesus was deeper than our attachment to money or power?

Remember, when Jesus turned to Peter and invited him to cast his nets again, he didn't just do it in the same place. Rather Jesus instructed him to put the boat out into the deep water and then put the net in again.⁵

In the same way, when we commit our lives to following Jesus, we are asked to step away from what is already comfortable...to not just keep repeating the same actions...to challenge ourselves to go to new places and to live in new ways.

Most of us have been raised in a Christianity that allows us to keep all of our creature comforts and not be challenged by it. Most of us have been raised in a Christianity that allows us to keep all of our bigotries and not feel challenged to let go of them. Most of us have been raised in a Christianity that allows us to keep our allegiances to money and power and nation, and not give them a second thought. Most of us have been raised in a Christianity that allows us to keep our alliances with the empire and not worry a thing about it.

But, friends, the challenge – and it is a challenge – is that this Christianity that we are so comfortable in, this Christianity that allows us to stay where it is safe, to stay in what we know, to live our lives as consumers and power brokers and people focused on accumulation...this is not the faith of Jesus.

No, the faith of Jesus calls us to a different place. The faith of Jesus calls us to different priorities. The faith of Jesus asks us to take risks, to go into the deep water whether that means

⁵ Luke 5:4, NRSV.

in the building of relationships with people we once called enemy or the sharing of our resources in such a way that it changes our lives or the asking of hard questions that we would rather avoid.

The faith of Jesus and the commitment to follow Jesus asks something of us. And if we are always comfortable then we might not be listening.

So, what would it mean for you to go in to the deep water? What would it mean for you to risk something substantial for your faith? What is the new place to which Jesus is calling you?

I wonder...I wonder what would happen if we, individually and as a congregation, were ready to listen. I wonder what would happen if we, individually and as a congregation, were ready to take the risks, to go into the deep water and to truly follow Jesus.

May it be so.