

Simon’s boat was his pride and joy. He’d worked for years, wading into the water, casting his net, hauling in the fish, dreaming of the day when he could sail or row out into the deeper water where the big fish were and the big money was made. Of course, he wouldn’t go too far out. The Sea of Galilee was notorious for sudden storms. A blast of cold air could come over Mount Hermon to the north, bounce off the Golan Heights to the east, and transform a sunny day into sudden danger. There was no way he was going to take that kind of risk!

His heart swelled with pride every time he looked at her; made from 12 different kinds of wood, none native to Galilee, 26.5 feet long, 7.5 feet wide, 4.5 feet deep. She was a thing of beauty. Every time he set out from shore (and thanks to her, he now had a house that was just a stone’s throw from the synagogue in the center of Capernaum and just a stone’s throw from the water’s edge – a prime location!) everyone could see that he was somebody! He had arrived, and with his partnership with James and John, he was still on his way, because unlike so many fishermen, he had a boat.

A few more nights like this one; however, and he’d be back wading in the water with everyone else. Two boats casting drag nets all night long, and not one fish! It was as though the sea was against them, but that was superstitious nonsense!

He was ready to call it a night when Jesus suddenly climbed into the boat and asked him to row out a little ways so he could speak to the crowd. It was quite a crowd, and Jesus had healed his mother-in-law. He owed it to him to be a good host, so Simon ignored the protests of his tired muscles and began to row. What was he getting himself into now?

Jesus’ call of Simon is so familiar it’s almost become a cliché - *Luke 5:10 (NRSV)* “*Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.*”<sup>1</sup> Jesus points Simon in a new direction; his work will have a new outcome. All Peter has to do is surrender his boat and go deep.

## Ω SURRENDER YOUR BOAT

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My view of Simon and his boat changed when I was in Israel. His house is in the center of town, close to the synagogue and close to the water. His boat set him apart. He wasn’t some poor peasant barely making a living. That was my image from Sunday School.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Simon had a career. He wasn't wealthy, but he was doing well enough to make a significant investment in his business. Most fishermen in ancient times simply waded into the water and cast their nets. To take the next step and buy a boat meant going to where boats were built – likely somewhere on the Mediterranean, about 20 miles away - and having the boat hauled on some sort of wagon back to the Sea of Galilee.

Simon had a lot riding on that boat. He'd staked his life on that boat. He wasn't just Peter, the fisherman; he was Peter, the fisherman who owned a boat. He was somebody!

It may not seem like much of a difference to us, but what gives us our sense of status, success, and self-esteem? What tells us, “I'm somebody?” Advertisers offer us all sorts of answers – the right car, the right jewelry, the right salary. Society sets all these standards before us to which we are to aspire, and when get our boat; well, then we've arrived. We made it. We're somebody. Our lives stretch out before us, and we are looking good! Nothing but smooth sailing ahead for us!

Then Jesus rocks our boat. He gets in and without so much as a “how do you do,” he says to us, “Row your boat over there. I have work to do. I have work for you.”

“But, but, but, it's my boat. Why do I have to surrender my boat to you, Jesus? Can't you just stand over there in the shallow water and talk? It's not that deep, and the crowd's not that big. Go over there, Jesus, and stop rocking my boat!”

Jesus doesn't ask us for is most important to us; Jesus asks us for what is too important to us. He asks us to hand over the things that have a hold on us. He asks us to surrender our boat.

So what is your boat? What has a hold on you?

Watergate taught us to “follow the money.” To discern what has a hold on us – follow the fear. What are you anxious about? What do you resist? What “can't” you do?

What if you did? What if you stopped resisting and surrendered your boat?

Or, follow the fear in the opposite direction: what “must” you do? What do you have to do? What if you didn't? What if you let go and surrendered your boat?

Jesus doesn't ask us for what is most important to us; he asks us for what is too important to us. He asks us to hand over the things that have a hold on us. Follow your fear. Surrender your boat. Take the plunge and go deep.

Ω GO DEEP

Have you ever had “one of those days?” “One of those days” when like Simon, James and John, you've given the proverbial 110% and you have nothing to show for it. You're tired. You're frustrated. You are not in your happy place!

Then someone takes it upon themselves to try to “help.” They offer you suggestions to try to fix it. “Try turning your computer off and back on again.” “Try stirring it while it simmers.” “Lift with your legs and not your back.”

You smile at them. Smiling keeps your teeth together so you don't grind them or worse yet, open your mouth and say what you are thinking. “Thank you for stating the obvious. I haven't thought of that for 7 hours. I need some way to vent all my frustration and you could be it.”

Jesus says to Simon, *Luke 5:4-5 (NRSV)* “*Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.*”<sup>5</sup> *Simon answered [and I wonder if there was frustration in his voice], “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.”*<sup>2</sup>

“If you say so” – not exactly a ringing statement of faith is it?

Simon has been working within his limits; he'd gone as far as he felt safe; he's done all that he knew to do. Jesus invites him to live beyond his limits; to move out into the deep water; to go deep and get In over his head.

A wise person once said: “If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you always got, and you'll always feel what you always felt.”<sup>3</sup> In Gandhi's classic phrase: “Be the change you seek.”

That's the deeper commitment that lurks beneath this fish story. Will Simon surrender his boat – his hopes, his dreams, his plans, his sense of control; and “seek first the

<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.quickandsimple.com/fun/inspirational-quotes/always-do-always-done>

kingdom?” Will Simon expand his vision beyond making a good living to making a meaningful difference? Will he commit himself to the call of Jesus Christ to catch people?

If you are frustrated this morning; if you are sick and tired of being sick and tired, then go deep! Get in over your head! Let go of the illusion of control. Try moving in a different direction. We are only as stuck as we choose to be.

Here’s a spiritual practice I invite you to try for Lent. It’s called the welcoming prayer.

When you are having “one of those days,” “*Welcome* the Divine Indwelling in the feelings, emotions, thoughts, commentaries, or sensations in your body by saying “**Welcome.**”

*Let go* by repeating the following sentences: “**I let go of the desire for security, affection, control.**”

“**I let go of the desire to change this feeling/sensation.**”

Father Thomas Keating: “Welcoming Prayer is the practice that actively lets go of thoughts and feelings that support the false-self system. It embraces painful emotions experienced in the body rather than avoiding them or trying to suppress them. It does not embrace the suffering as such but the presence of the Holy Spirit in the particular pain, whether physical, emotional, or mental. Thus, it is the full acceptance of the content of the present moment. [In] giving the experience over to the Holy Spirit, the false-self system is gradually undermined and the true self liberated.<sup>4</sup>”

Jesus doesn’t ask us for what is most important to us; he asks us for what is too important to us. He asks us to hand over the things that have a hold on us. “If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you always got, and you’ll always feel what you always felt.”<sup>5</sup> Surrender your boat. Take the plunge and go deep.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.contemplativeoutreach.org](http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.quickandsimple.com/fun/inspirational-quotes/always-do-always-done>