

Sunday, August 14, 2016 - Wading In
John 21:1-13 CEB
Marysville United Methodist Church
Pastor Jenny Smith

I'll never forget the first time Isabella, on her first birthday met the Atlantic Ocean for the first time. It was her first time at a real beach - Alaska beaches don't count! She wasn't walking yet so we watched her tentatively crawl over rocks, pebbles, shells and scratchy sand until she was face to face with the unknown water. She got closer and closer and we watched the curious look on her face while she felt the water run between her fingers. There were a couple splashes and then she backed out, content to explore another unknown.

You've likely experienced the feeling of wading into cold water to find yourself bouncing, dancing, anything to help warm up. Then we find that often if we could just dive underwater, we'd get used to the water pretty quickly.

The same anticipation and curiosity and avoidance happens when we move into a new area of our life with God. Whether it's the first time you've considered following Jesus or it's a renewed relationship with our Creator, there will likely be a little hopping, avoidance of uncomfortable things and a sneaking suspicion that if we'd just plunge in and give our whole selves to it, it might be okay again.

We heard our story in John 21 again this morning.

Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, Zebedee's sons, two other disciples were together
Peter wants to fish
They go with him

Their friend and leader has just died and came back to life. Talk about emotional whiplash. They don't know what to do. All of life is upside down. So they do something familiar, known, comforting. They go fishing. I imagine them getting the boat ready, grabbing their nets and pushing the boat out into the open water allows their soul to take a deep breath. Ahh...okay. Fishing? We understand this. This thing Jesus is up to? Completely confusing.

But then Jesus is back. But the seven men don't know it's him. To them, it's a stranger calling from the beach. "Have you caught anything to eat?" "No." The stranger calls, "Try the other side!"

And they listen. And they're overwhelmed with abundance. More than they could ever need.

The disciples were called to something new. They were given the Holy Spirit. They saw all the miracles. They were as close to the Jesus story as one could get. And maybe it just felt like too much. So they went fishing.

Looking Back -- Looking Forward -- The Moment

That's us, isn't it?

It's like our life gets thrown in a blender sometimes and we don't recognize it anymore. We stand at the edge of the shore and look behind us at our old lives. What we used to know and find comforting. But now, it's increasingly clear to us that that way isn't working anymore. God is nudging us towards something new. But then we turn and look out on the vast open water. And we feel a sense of terror, anxiety, fear and maybe a little curiosity.

Those are the moments we have a simple choice. We can return to what we know. Or take the first nervous terrifying step towards the unknown.

This might be how it feels...
...as retirement approaches.
...as we become a new parent.
...when we start a new relationship. Or we end a relationship

We stand in that space between the known and the unknown....
...when we start a new school year.
...when we end a bad habit.
...when we move to a new place.
...when we face the end of our lives.
...when we choose to follow Jesus for the first time...or the 55th time.

In high school, I wanted to be a music teacher. I played piano for several choirs and percussion in the band. I idolized my different music teachers and felt it was such a great job. Others from my church would randomly ask if I've ever considered full-time ministry and working in the church. I resisted that thought. I looked for colleges with a good music program. I rationalized, explained and tried to convince myself this was the path.

Then, at 18 years old, I attended Exploration, a gathering for young people considering a call into ministry. And during that time, I knew I was supposed to be a pastor. There was a moment when I was on a plane from Dallas back to Alaska. I remember like it was yesterday, sitting in my window seat and peering out into the darkness. I saw one little twinkling star that seemed to get brighter and brighter as we flew northward to snowy mountains of Alaska. I felt a tear stream down my cheek, and then the other one and I felt this thought deep in my soul, "Yes, God. I'll go and do whatever you ask, as long as you're leading. I'm all in." From that moment on, I've been all in to this calling of pastor. Yes, there are some days I wonder if I should do something different, but then I realize I'm so far away from my past life, that I couldn't return to it if I tried. And then I stop looking back at what was and turn again to look forward, into the unknown, with renewed hope and trust that whatever is coming, God is already there. And that's all I need to know.

So we all get opportunities to stand at the edge of the known and unknown...to wade in, to dip our toes into a new experience.

What does wading in look like at our church?

When we come to a place where we're ready to learn more about faith, God and following the steps of Jesus Christ, then we're ready to wade into the water.

Wading in means we want to learn more about prayer, reading the Bible, our history and traditions, what it means to be a disciple of Jesus and a United Methodist.

And here's the beauty of wading in, it's not only for someone new to faith. Some of us have been hanging around the bonfire on the beach for 20 years and haven't dug down deep into our prayer life. Or we're still confused about why we're encouraged to consider giving and tithing to a local church. Or we really want to learn more about the great stories in the Old Testament and how they affect our lives today. Exploring things like that is wading in.

This church values questions and exploration and wondering. They don't threaten our faith, they strengthen it. God can handle our questions. God expects our questions.

So God delights when we choose to wade into a new area of our life together. Regardless of if it's our second week here or our 15th year.

This fall, we've got some new opportunities for us to wade in and explore together.

Old Testament Highlights, Speaking Christian, Monday Groups, Financial Peace University

Next week, we'll share about all the different boats (small groups opportunities for study, relationships and serving) available this fall.

Here's another gift of grace in our story for today. The disciples chose what felt comfortable and familiar. Jesus didn't yell at them or shame them for that choice. He walks into their life, without fanfare or a big parade, they didn't even know it was him. Jesus asks them a question, "got anything to eat?" And then tells them to turn and try the other side of the boat. That was it. He didn't give them a big lecture or theological conversation, a litmus test of belief. He said, "**try it this way.**" And they did. And in their abundance, **that's when they recognized Jesus.**

Good things happen in the water when Jesus invites us there. And whose life will be changed because of the good God might do in you? But we have to face our fear of not knowing what will happen when we wade in. We can't control the outcomes when Jesus invites us into the water. Are you willing to wade into a new area in your life and faith as our fall season approaches? God will meet you there. Amen.