

The Blessings of Depth
Sermon February 6, 2022

A majestically beautiful picture unfolds before us as we are reading this story: Jesus stood alone on the shores of the beautiful Lake Gennesaret, perhaps praying, perhaps admiring the beauty of the landscape, perhaps contemplating.

And all at once, He realized that there is a large crowd around Him, people who have come after Him in groups from all over and stood reverently on the rising shore and waited for Jesus to speak.

Then Jesus got into a small fishing boat and, in a very gentle way, as He most of the time did, He talked to the crowd. Oh, what an uplifting moment, what an exceptional blessed time these people experienced as they took a break from their daily routines. These people were looking for Jesus, longing for the Word of God to refresh their weary souls.

In fact, this beautiful scene will be repeated every time we, as a congregation, gather to listen to the word of Christ. My hope is that, during every service, as you are sitting next to Christ, listening to His words, an amazing feeling is crossing your heart as you say to yourself: yes, this is the feeling and the message I needed for a long time; this is the community my soul longs for; it is so good to be here; this community of my friends is like a balm for my soul.

May the Lord continue to create in us a sincere thirst in our souls for the Word of God, and for healthy spiritual nourishment.

Today, the Gospel is preached in so many places and so many ways. People have many opportunities to hear the word of God, but I hardly see real serious spiritual awakening. We don't too often see people who would come forward telling us that he or she was listening to the words of God, and God's work illuminated their heart in a very special way, and now can say with the hymn's writer: "I was blind but now I see." My assumption is that they are maybe too shy to share their spiritual experiences.

I feel very blessed because, here in our Calvin family, I met quite a few members and friends who shared that now they understand much more from God's words, or now they can pray with more faith, or they are more enthusiastic knowing that they are God's children.

What could be the reason that just a few people are converted these days?

Also, what is the reason that just a few people are coming into a living relationship with Christ Jesus? What is the reason that people cannot make another big step from being religious to being a believer and a witness of Christ?

What is happening to us really during a service?

We are coming to the Lord to be blessed, to be spiritually refreshed, to be healed, to relax, to rejoice in God's majesty and grace. And as we leave the service, our souls start to disengage and disintegrate. Our hearts cool down again and they begin to harden again, as many other influences start to impact us. The challenges take away from us the joy we received from Christ, and we are back where we were. This reality shows that it is a great blessing to sit down in groups at the feet of Christ and listen to His speech, but it is not enough. Christ has many more blessings in store for us.

The crowd on the shore just listened to Jesus and then left. However, Peter and those who stayed in a boat with Jesus experienced the power of Christ in a very tangible way, and almost collapsed under the blessing of God.

For it came to pass, that, as Jesus was commanded, they cast in their net, and caught an unprecedented amount of fish. Their net broke, and they had to ask for help, and called the other boat to help take away the abundant blessing of God.

Here is what Jesus wants for everyone: that your life should be a life rich in blessings.

Such was the life of the Apostle Paul, rich in God, of which Timothy writes, saying, "*And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.*" (1 Timothy 1:14) Beyond expectation, above reason, God is flooding His children with His goodness, His love, and all His blessings. Not only does God want you to experience the miracle of hearing your prayers once in a while, but each time you pray, you have great wealth in the experience of God hearing your prayers. God wants not only that guilt and repentance be consumed because of the many good intentions that have failed, but also that your life be filled with triumphs over sin, that you yourself may be rich in the experience of Christ, who triumphs over sin. God wants you to not only rarely experience His helping hand reach into your life, but also to fill your life with

miracles and solutions that testify of God's power and love. God wants to fill your life with evidence of His grace, love, precious experiences of faith, almost ruining the abundance of His blessing so that you cannot stand alone but call on others for help. We usually turn to someone else for help when we are weak, fallen, miserable - but abundance also has a state where we can no longer stand alone, we can no longer fit in it, we are already torn under our web: we have to share it with others. Have you had such an experience, brothers and sisters, such a vast experience of God's blessing that you felt it didn't fit in you, it filled your soul to get out of you, you had to tell others, you had to share it with other people? Well, that's how God wants to bless you again every day. He wants to put your hand full of His wealth.

Have you ever experienced this abundant richness of God's grace? It is quite different: it is much more than just sitting at the feet of Jesus, delighting in His science, being engulfed in His sublime teachings and words with a thirsty soul. It means that I experience the truth of all that Christ speaks, I live all that He says, I truly receive, and I abound in all that He promises. Therefore, stand not only on the shore of the kingdom of God, my brothers and sisters, and not only listen from there to the beautiful speech, but paddle deep with Jesus into the deep waters of our Christian reformed faith, and then you will experience the true riches of the divine power of Christ!

Jesus said to Peter, "Paddle down."

And now Jesus says to you, "Come also to the deep." Has anyone ever experienced the difference between getting to know a person superficially or thoroughly? It often happens that a person who seems worthless and meaningless at first sight is more and more loved and valued after several encounters. You can also make an acquaintance with Jesus. In fact, all knowledge of Christ begins this way — but it is a great problem if one remains just an acquaintance, and never wants to know Him better. Preaching or evangelization can do no more than introduce a person to Jesus. If someone then wants to go further than the introduction, they have to paddle deep themselves.

If there are awakened souls here, if there are those here who have been touched by the call of Christ, to them it is commanded in particular: Paddle down. To fill your life with the blessings God has provided, you need to paddle deep. Take out your

Bible daily and study it, but not as superficially and hastily as you may have done so far, but paddle deep, dig deep into it, read it yourself, immerse yourself! Many people read the Bible, but it is of no use because it is hasty: reading the Bible is like an external religious ritual for them that they go through every day. Well, every time you open your Bible, the encouragement of Jesus should ring in your ear: paddle deep! The Word may say nothing on the first reading, but on the third or fifth or sixth reading the riches of God will be opened, and God will reward the effort with a result we would not have dared to hope for.

Prayer is always associated with the study of the Scriptures. In the Bible, God speaks to you; in prayer, you answer Him. Here, too, let the same slogan lead that we spoke of earlier: every time we put our hands together in prayer, the encouragement of Jesus rings in our ears: paddle deep! Immerse yourself in prayer the way Jesus did, who often watched in prayer all night long. Examine, brothers and sisters, your own prayer life. Have you penetrated enough into the depths of the possibilities of prayer, or is your prayer still as shallow in one place as it used to be?

Jesus says to Peter, "Paddle down into the deep, and cast out your net." This is as if to say the blessing of God that surpasses all your hopes awaits you, but first you paddle deep. There you will find the blessing.

But we want to reach out for God's blessings first, without really rowing deep. Why are we so spiritually anemic? Why do we not know the great beauties of God's kingdom? Why is the richness of God's grace unknown to us? Because our Bible-reading and prayer life is terribly superficial. Yet, my brothers and sisters, the greatest blessing in the world does not make up for the rich blessings of the minutes and hours that God spends in the face of man. As Jesus said: secretly, closing your door, locking yourself in your inner room, immersing yourself in prayer and Bible study, rowing deep and throwing nets into the catch: these are the times when one can receive the most blessings from God. This cannot be replaced by Bible study, worship, or evangelism — not to the church, but to the individual, the commandment goes to you and me: paddle deep! If you do not to have the blessings of evangelization or worship erased from your life after a while, brothers and sisters, accept Jesus' command and paddle deep! Awakening, conversion is just the beginning: move on, in the kingdom of God!

And you still have to do something. If you have really awakened, if you have truly repented, if you have truly followed in the footsteps of Christ: then your relationship with other people needs to change radically too!

According to the story, Jesus says to Peter, "Fear not; from now on you will be fishing for people." In order for a person to stay close to God, it is absolutely necessary to do the work of fishing for other human souls without interruption. The follower of Christ is interested in every other man, but without exception, in only one aspect: that he must win that other man at all costs for Christ. Think of people as swimming like fish, fidgeting in the sea of life's miseries, and it is up to you, the fisherman, to trap these people in the net of Christ. If you do not know how to approach Him, turn to the church. He will help you; give Him an opportunity to serve. Everyone here in the church can find the place from which they can best handle the web of Christ.

In the Gospel of Matthew, this scene is described as Jesus saying to the fishermen on the boat, "*I want you to fish for people.*" (Matthew 4:19) Therefore, put your trust in Jesus, and He will make you fishermen.

Paddle deep and fish people to His glory! This is how you will have the true blessing of God without being able to keep it to yourself; you have to share it with others.

So, paddle deep and go fishing for life!

Amen.