

Shorelines – based on Matthew 4:12-23
Aspen Community UMC
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Page 1 of 5

When I was a child, I spent many hours at the lake.
I enjoyed being on the boat dock. My uncle taught me to fish
and even though I reeled up tree limbs as often as I did fish,
I loved the experience. I learned to be soothed somehow by the laps of water
as they bounced on the side of the dock, or the boat or the shoreline.

To this day, I enjoy being beside the water
whether it is at a sandy beach in Mexico, or the rocky edge of a tumbling river,
or the lapping of gentle water at the lakeshore.

There is just something about water that touches my soul.
Maybe that is why I have always been comforted to repeat:
“He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul” from the 23rd Psalm.

Maybe he invites me to step out of still waters,
to put down the nets I am mending or folding or just holding,
the work of my life, the things I do to make a living, or keep busy, living as I do.

Maybe he calls me from that activity
and out of the water
for a larger task.

The water, you know, in myth and legend,
represents that collective unconscious, at least according to
Carl Jung, and those who study dreams.

It is a kind of fertile unconscious
out of which we can bring knowledge and focus and purpose.

Perhaps Jesus is inviting us to do that
when he calls us out of the water onto the land to follow him.
The shoreline – crossing from an ocean of not-knowing or semi-knowing
to knowing who we are and who we can be -
calling us to be disciples.

He was inviting disciples – out of the water and onto the shore.

It is kind of a metaphor for becoming grounded, no airy fairy spirituality for Jesus
but spirit grounded in life and the needs of the world.

We often come to church to find grounding.
As human beings we are tossed and turned, even flailed around - as if in an ocean. Ever felt that way?
And, we become grounded in a variety of ways.

Sometimes just the rhythm of the liturgy – the call to worship -
the Lord's Prayer – reading scripture – can be grounding.
As we begin those actions, it is as if we step onto some shore.

For a couple of years I worked with a style of yoga
that was developed from an ancient Korean holistic health practice.
We would often chant what was actually that culture's creation story -
called the Chun Byu Kung.
Chanting this story helped us move into a deeper meditative consciousness.
Even the sounds as they reverberated in our heads and bodies
seemed to facilitate our moving into a more solid, deeper, kind of knowing,
kind of being present to ourselves and to God.
Singing does something similar. This is why singing is so good for us.

It is also like saying the Rosary in a Roman Catholic Church,
or the way we say the "Shema" in Jewish worship.
Chanting the Psalms is like that. Perhaps we could do that more.

Those things are grounding. They help move us from the water to the shore -
and help us find something to stand on, an internal kind of balance.

Perhaps Jesus offers us that when he calls us out of the water
and invites us to be disciples.

But, other things are also grounding – and that is action.
I attended an event at the Iliff School of Theology on Friday.
Bishop Ed Paup was one of our leaders for worship.
Bishop Paup is one of our Bishops in the Western Jurisdiction of our church
who serves the Pacific Northwest, which includes Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Alaska,
and now even a new United Methodist congregation in Canada.

He told about an experience a few years ago when he represented the United Methodist Committee on Relief in some work they did in Bosnia.

He told about a stone bridge, that for hundreds of years had connected the east and west areas of the Mostor community.

The bridge was destroyed in the war.

Think about what it means when a bridge is destroyed - and connections between communities are severed.

The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) helped build a suspension bridge over the crevice left from the destruction of the bridge. The purpose for the suspension bridge was to enable people to go back and forth while a new stone bridge was being built.

And finally, when the new bridge was completed, they could take down the suspension bridge.

The suspension bridge became of symbol of connection and restoration while the deeper work was done below in rebuilding the stone bridge.

Perhaps when Jesus calls us out of the water and onto the land, it is a little like connecting and restoring us to something we have lost.

Being disciples - is that a calling to build new bridges when they have been damaged? – or perhaps where they have never been?

Actions are also grounding. We are not called to the shore for our own internal balance, we are called to the shore to build and restore.

Bishop Paup also talked about how the United Methodist Committee on Relief and Muslim Aid (the largest affiliation of Muslim Relief organizations in the world) worked together in 2006 to facilitate access for each other in Sri Lanka into an area previously closed to both due to ethnic and religious tensions. And in July 2007 in London, UMCOR and Muslim Aid signed a memorandum of understanding to work together in the future.

Interested? Google "UMCOR" and "Muslim Aid"

It was a grassroots initiative in 2006 in Sri Lanka that lead to this global agreement signed this past summer.

Building bridges – stepping out of the boat - Disciples do that.

It seems to me that the spirit of God walks along the shores of our lives
and invites us to let go of the fears we cling to, even of people.

It seems to me that the spirit of God invites us
to let go of the things we think we have to have, the lifestyles we have to maintain,
and step on to something more enduring that enlarges us,
enables us to participate in what we might even call divine work.

Albert Schweitzer said something about this at the end of his book

The Quest for the Historical Jesus:

He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside.

He came to those who knew Him not.

He speaks to us the same word: "Follow thou me!"
and sets us to the tasks which he has to fulfill for our time.

He commands, and to those who obey him, whether they be wise or simple,
he will reveal himself in the toil, the conflicts,
the sufferings which they shall pass through in his fellowship,
and in ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience who he is.

"Follow thou me!" ...and sets us to the tasks which he has to fulfill for our time.

Where are those tasks for us in this time?

The shorelines of our lives are places of energy and opportunity,
places of potential,
places where we become disciples of the world,
and as Christians disciples of Christ.

So, I invite you to consider the shorelines of your own life
and how Christ invites you to put down your nets.

Never mind the mending or the folding or just holding them.

I think about how when I would stand up in a small fishing boat, it rocked back and forth.

And it's a little uneasy at first.

But, then stepping from the boat to the land, I seldom fell down.

The shoreline -

and then to consider stepping into a kind of discipleship that is inviting you now.

We learn something about discipleship from Simon and Andrew, and James and John
because they followed Jesus.

And we learn about it from our own church and what it does in the world.

You know it because people talk about it.

You may know it because you have done it.

I want to close with a poem, adapted from an unknown author.¹

Let us pray:

Spirit of God, you wander along the shore of our life
and you see the many things we cling to...
trinkets and toys, the need to succeed, careers that do harm.
Release us, O Spirit.... so we can follow Christ more faithfully.

Spirit of God, you wander along the shore of our life
and you see the many things we cling to...
deadly habits, destructive anger, anxiety, and depression.
Release us, O Spirit, so we can follow Christ more faithfully.

Spirit of God, you wander along the shore of our life
and you see the many things we cling to...
harmful relationships, bad attitudes, cynicism, lack of faith, divisions, and discord.
Release us, O Spirit, so we can follow Christ more faithfully.

And in so doing, manifest your presence
with each breath we take
and each thing we do.
And manifest your presence
in all of our encounters with one another.
Amen.

Jesus walked along that shoreline
in the busy commercial fishing village of Capernaum a long time ago.

And changed some lives.

And, we keep reading the story, and we do that because it has something for us today.

I hope I have connected with some of the shorelines in your lives
and invited you to step across them.

¹ *Seasons of the Spirit*