

## Scouting the Deep

There was a group of Scouts who just after sunrise began a hike up the path called Baldy Mountain. Baldy is the highest peak in the Philmont Scout Ranch at 12,441 feet. It is a high-adventure backpacking camp run by the Boy Scouts of America. At the summit, hikers enjoy a spectacular view of the mountains, forests and lakes of northern New Mexico.

But the summit was still a dream when the eight Scouts and two adults started out hiking through dense pine forests in the early morning light. Reaching a mountain stream, they took turns leading down a wide and comfortable trail for about a mile. It turned out to be the wrong trail.

Realizing their mistake, they turned around and hiked back. The detour added an extra two miles to their trip. You might think they would be discouraged but the extra distance had a surprising benefit. One Scout who had been struggling at the start of the hike gained confidence throughout the detour. When the troop got back on track, he felt strong enough to hike to the summit. His success required venturing out beyond his comfort zone. We too can find success if we will venture out beyond our comfort zone. It may come as an unexpected surprise. The question for us becomes, will we accept the unexpected challenge or turn away?

Our opening story tells the tale about a group of Scouts who accepted a challenge. The Boy Scouts of America have been challenging Scouts to push their limits for a century now, February 8, 2010 is their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of incorporation as an organization. On this Boy Scout weekend, we want to stop and recognize the impact of this organization, one that has involved over 110 million Americans this past century.

Scouting has formed astronauts, 11 of the 12 men who walked on the moon have been scouts. Nine of the 100 members of the U.S. Senate, are Eagle Scouts. Adventurer Steve Faucet was a Boy Scout. One of the best parts of Scouting is the challenge boys experience when exploring the wide range of outdoor activities and educational programs.

These opportunities make discovery exciting because they find new parts of themselves and the world around them. They find the comfort of home is no match to the excitement that happens when they venture out.

Jesus would agree. We discover in the fifth chapter of Luke, Jesus is talking to a crowd by Lake Gennesaret. The crowd is pressing in on him to hear what he has to say. Jesus notices two boats sitting empty because the fishermen have left them to wash their nets. Jesus gets into Simon Peters boat and asks him to push the boat out from the shore. Jesus keeps a safe distance from the crowd and continues to teach them (vv. 1-3).

When Jesus nears the end of his lesson with the crowd, he continues with a dramatic illustration. He calls to Simon Peter,

“Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch” (v. 4).

Put out into the *deep* water. Jesus doesn't say, “It's shallow over here, so try over there.” He's challenging Simon by pointing out the real possibilities that exist in the deep where it is risky. He invites us as well to venture out, to take a chance, to be active and adventurous. Jesus wants Simon to go beyond his comfort zone but Simon has something to say, “Master, we have worked all night but have caught nothing,”

Simon is lamenting. He wants to stay close to shore where it is safe and comfortable because his time on the water hasn't been fruitful. But he's open and not stubborn, “If you say so, I will let down the nets.” (v. 5).

What are the results? Simon and his fellow fishermen catch so many fish that their nets begin to break. They call for their partners in the other boat to come and help, and they end by filling both boats to the point that they're both beginning to sink (vv. 6-7).

It's an unexpected and overwhelming catch. All because they were willing to follow Jesus' request and scout the deep water.

That's the challenge for us today: to venture beyond our comfort zone and to put out into the deep water in order to engage our Christian discipleship. Too often we stay close to the shore, safe and comfortable, while Jesus is calling us to be active, adventurous and willing to explore new territory because that is where the fish are. That's when growth happens, where we make surprising discoveries in the world around us.

We scout the deep water *when we venture out to share our Christian faith with our neighbors*. Jesus says, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people" (v. 10). It is both a challenge and a request to reach out to our friends and neighbors with the gospel message.

But how? How do we reach beyond ourselves and enter the challenge?

In her book *Unbinding the Gospel*, Martha Grace Reese says, "Our most important discovery is a vivid relationship with God who lies at the heart of real evangelism." You have to ask yourself, "Has being a Christian made any difference in my life?" If so, then you're going to want to share this reality with other people. Quite simply, evangelism is grounded in the realization that our life is better because of our relationship with God who benefits you and others as well.

Reese says evangelism (reaching out to others) is all about relationships. Not high-pressure "Jesus Saves" programs but relationships. To be fruitful, we need to examine who we are in God's light, and then find our natural way of sharing the relationship we have in Christ with others.

We scout the deep water when we welcome people who are different from us such as other races, nationalities and social status into our lives and this congregation. God spoke through the prophet Isaiah, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (56:7).

The fact is, less than 7% of the churches in the United States are multiracial. If we are going to reach out for Christ, we have to do better.

It's not easy. We have to find creative ways to reach out and embrace new people while not alienating our current members. One congregation, Christ Presbyterian Church near Chicago, offered multicultural worship by including stoles from Guatemala, pulpit cloths from Ghana and songs sung in English, Spanish, Tagalog and Twi.

This diversity in worship reflects the makeup of the church, where a third of the congregation is now international, from places such as Brazil, the Philippines, Mexico and Scotland. At Christ Presbyterian, diversity isn't just something the church works around or tolerates. It is who they have become as a congregation and they celebrate diversity.

Other ways we can scout the deep water occurs *when we embark on short-term mission trips to repair damage done by hurricanes, or when we commit ourselves to tutoring at the public schools or when we create alternative worship services to reach the unchurched in our community.* All of these require an active and adventurous spirit. It requires courage, openness and a willingness to explore new territory.

The important thing is to venture out, to go beyond our comfort zone.

We cannot know abundant life in Christ if we continue to play it safe. If we're going to experience growth in the Christian faith, we have to venture out and take chances. Jesus said to his followers later in Luke, "Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it" (9:24).

That's the message for us today. Life comes from death — allowing our comfort and control to die as we follow Jesus. We die to ourselves yet surprisingly we find life, and that is called Resurrection, new life.

Each of us is challenged. We are offered chances to follow Jesus along the path of life each day. We will have setbacks and disappointments, and we will lose our way at certain points in the journey. But we will make amazing discoveries as well, if we scout the deep water.

To close, I want to share a story about an adventurer from long ago.

The great explorer, Sir Francis Drake, while attempting to recruit a number of young men for an upcoming exploration. He gathered them and told the group that if they came with him they would see some of the most marvelous things their eyes could ever behold. Sandy white beaches, juicy fruits, foreign peoples, priceless treasures, and gorgeous landscapes and he told them that this wild adventure could be theirs if they came with him. Not one of them enlisted for the journey.

The next day a different group came out. Drake told them that if they came with him they would encounter storms that would terrify them into tears. Tiger winds would hammer them and blow them off course for months. Water would frequently be scarce. At times they would be so thirsty, their very souls would cry out for simply one drop of water. In short, danger would always be their constant companion.

Drake concluded by declaring that if they could handle these things, the joys of exploration would exceed their wildest dreams. Every single one of men in the assembled crowd joined Sir Francis Drake that day, some did not even go home to say goodbye to their families. They boarded the boat eager for the journey to begin.

What made the difference in these two groups?

Why did the first group turn down the mission and the second jump at the opportunity?

Was the second group different and more adventurous than the first?

The answer is: No. It is not the men who changed; it was the message. The first message spoke of rewards; the second spoke of challenges. The first offered comfort; the second promised suffering. The first tempted them with things; the second seduced them with an experience unlike any other.

I think Sir Francis Drake discovered what Jesus knew all too well. And that is this: The paths that are offered to us must promise to shape us, build our character, and change our world view if they are to have any appeal at all. When we are presented with a challenge that will change us and make us better, we will be eager for the journey.

What did Jesus offer his disciples that made them so eager for their journey?

1. Jesus offered them a change.
2. The mission promised to be a challenge.
3. And their lives would never be the same.

Our offer may not be the same because each of us have different talents, different experiences and are at different points along our journey. One thing we can be sure of, Jesus is calling. He is calling us to step out, to let down our nets and allow Christ to work a miracle in our lives. It will transform what we have known and deepen our relationship with Christ.

I encourage you to take the challenge, cast out into the deep water and let down your nets, Jesus is calling and he will not disappoint.

Thanks be to God. Amen