

“Finding God in Deep Places”

Luke 5:1-11

Rev. Scott B. Martin – 2-4-07

An important question that sooner or later everyone, and mean literally everyone, must ask themselves is, **“What kind of world do we live?”** Is it a world in which basically what you see is what you get? Remember we can only see what is on the surface. Or is it a world filled with hidden depths,realities that lie below the surface,..... that we rarely see,..... but which are at least as real as the world we see,perhaps even more real,..... more profound? As people of faith we believe and proclaim the later,although we need reminders from time to time,..... fresh stirrings of the Holy Spirit..... to give us eyes to see,..... ears to hear,and a receptive soul to perceive it. Jesus tells Peter, **“Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.”**

I’ve been reading the National Geographic magazine for more than 40 years, since I was a young boy. I remember being fascinated by the stories they would run from time to time of the strange creatures living in the deepest parts of the seas, down in the cold, darkness, where not a single ray of light penetrates. There are strange fish living there that look like something out of a dream. Some have lights that dangle from their bodies. There are giant squids and now oceanographers have discovered a whole community animals, corals, and algae living around volcanic thermal vents, from which super heated water and chemicals pour forth that would kill anything on the surface, but which in these great depths provide warmth, food and sustenance.

I remember as a boy being fascinated by the idea that way below the surface of the ocean, deep down where until recently no one knew they existed, was a whole other world. No, that’s not quite right; there is only one planet earth. Deep down below the surface of this world we thought we knew so well there were realities that no one knew existed and no one thought possible.

Recently a brand new building was added to the Denver Art Museum. It is an angular, modernist building, filled with sky lights and windows, to better appreciate the art. Marilynne Scott Mason describes the central stair case, saying, **“On the first floor, the broad granite staircase leads the eye in an awe-inspiring upward spiral to the galleries on the next three floors, on to a slanted skylight in the distant ceiling, suggesting the reverent grace of a great cathedral, the natural wonder of a chambered**

nautilus, and the exacting upward striving necessary in climbing mountain paths. The metaphor is unmistakable – this is the light that draws us, a guide and the prize of all human striving toward meaning.”

The architect was aiming for exactly this reaction. He intended the circular movement to express the ineffable around us. Daniel Libeskind says, **“The world is not just here by itself. I am not exceptional in believing this – I think every person who thinks and who experiences the world knows there is more to reality than physical, visible space. The spiritual is in the experience of life ... I think spiritual meaning is a global and universal aspiration.”** (Christians Science Monitor 2-1-07 p. 19)

How can we begin to catch a glimpse of the ineffable around us, the hidden depths? There are many ways, but given our limited time let me just briefly highlight a two.

First and foremost we can pay attention. When we pay attention even the most mundane, ordinary things can reveal the holy, as a poet once said, one can see God in a grain of sand!

NPR had a story about our multitasking world, filled with gadgets and distractions. A father was playing Candyland with his young daughter. His cell phone rang. He answered the phone, immediately forgot the game and got into a long conversation on the phone. Towards the end of his conversation he noticed the look on his daughters face. It was one of hurt and disappointment. She sensed that in that moment she was not as important to her father as his phone call.

Several days later they two of them were playing Candyland again. Once again his cell phone rang. The father answered it. It was his boss. Once again his daughter’s face fell. Then the father said to his boss, **“I can’t talk right now. I’m in the middle of a very exciting game of Candyland. I’ll tell you all about it when I come in tomorrow.”** The little girl was one big smile with two eyes on top! Paying attention, living in the now, as the Buddhist put it, is a very good way to experience the hidden depths of the simplest things.

Immersing oneself in the word of God, either in private devotion or in public worship is another way to discover God in the depths. Notice that chapter five begins with the simple note, **“Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God....”** Feeling the deep need for the Word of God is a very good place to begin to explore the depths and experience the holy. The crowd is so hungry for the Word of God that they are pressing on Jesus. He ends up looking around for a boat to get into. There

is Simon Peter, who has been fishing all night and hasn't caught anything. Jesus calls out to Peter to bring his boat in and Jesus gets in. Then he asks Peter to move a little off shore so he can continue speaking and teaching about the kingdom of God.

When the Word of God is present there is a seemingly "unnatural" superabundance. Luke says that when Jesus was done speaking he asks Peter to "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Peter and his companions have been fishing all night and caught absolutely nothing. None the less, they obey Jesus words and set out into the depths. They may have had minimal expectation about what was possible, but they obey anyway and we know the rest of the story. When they haul up their nets their boats are filled to the point that they were in danger of sinking! They had never had such a catch in their entire fishing careers! It was extraordinary! They never dreamed there were that many fish in the whole lake! Yet here they are standing in their boats with fish up to their hips!

Steven Vryhof tells the story of a miraculous, life-giving glimpse of God in a worship service that he attended in Sweden. He writes: "...I entered a Lutheran church in a small village on the coast of Sweden. Perhaps because of the early hour, or the lure of a beautiful summer morning, or the effects of state-run Lutheranism, there were only fourteen congregants gathered. The minister was a slender, blonde lad who had to be fresh out of seminary. I struggled with the Swedish hymns and the Lutheran tendency to stand to pray and sit to sing, the opposite of what I was used to. I joined others at the front railing for communion, taking the bread and the wine, then returning to my seat.

While the minister, his back to us, was putting away the elements, a parishioner, a middle-aged woman, returned to the front, this time pushing an old woman, presumably her mother, in a wheelchair. The mother had the classic nursing-home look: slumped to the right, thin, scraggly, colorless hair, vacant eyes, and a slack-jaw with her tongue showing a bit. She was here for communion. There was an awkward minute as we all waited for the minister to notice the two waiting at the railing. He finally did turn, perceived the situation, and proceeded to retrieve the elements. He carefully administered the bite of bread and cup of wine to the old woman. And then he paused, and I held my breath, because I knew what was going to happen next. The young minister looked at the old woman, physically a wreck of a human being, and he said to her the most important words that one human being can say to another human being. The minister looked her right in the eye and said to her, *'Var Herre Jesus Krist, vem kroop och blod ni hartatt*

emot, bevaran din sjal til evigh liv. ' **Our Lord Jesus Christ, whose body and blood you have received, preserve your soul unto everlasting life."**

And I suppose it was a coincidence, but it was a God-given coincidence nonetheless. At that precise moment, the bells of the church started pealing, ringing and resonating and resounding and reverberating through the church and through me, making the hair on the back of my head stand up. Heaven touched earth and it seemed that Var Herre Jesus Krist, himself was saying, 'Yes! I will do that!' And then the Father and the Spirit joined the Son, and using the same words given to Julian of Norwich, the Triune God proclaimed loudly over the ringing of the bells, '**I may make all things well, and I can make all things well, and I shall make all things well; and I will make all things well, and you will see yourself that every kind of thing will be well!"**' (Steven Vryhof, "Crash Helmets and Church Bells," *Perspectives*, August/September 2000, p. 3)

God can be found in deep places all around us! Amen.