

“Rising Waters”, Week 2 of Navigating Deep Waters

Presented By Rev. Kristen Lowe on 9/16/2018
At Crossroads United Methodist Church
Waunakee, WI

Scripture:

Genesis 6:9-10, 12-22

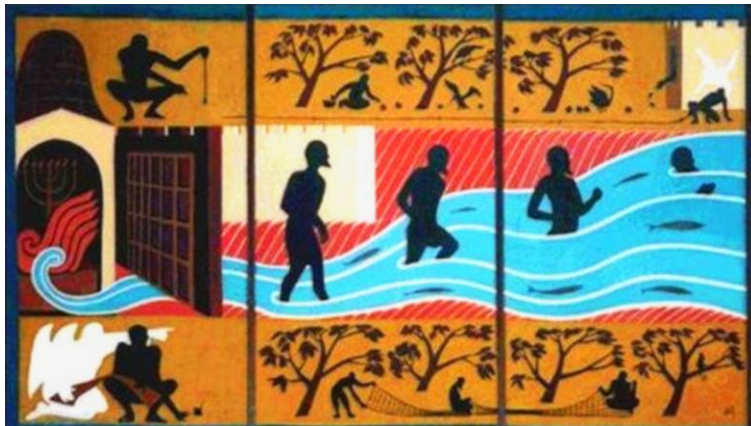
This is the account of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, “I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons’ wives with you. You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them.” Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

1Peter 3:20-21

There were those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 11:1-3, 6

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.



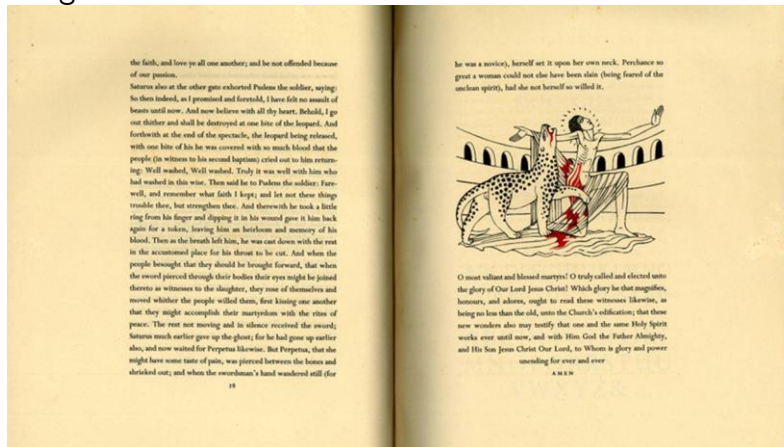
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Ezekiel is a deeply mysterious book. What we know about the prophet Ezekiel comes solely from the book that bears his name. He was among the Jews exiled to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 b.c., and there among the exiles he received his call to become a prophet we know that he was married, lived in a house of his own and along with his fellow exiles, though confined to Babylonia, had a relatively free existence there.

Ezekiel is a priest called to minister to the exiles, which was *difficult* in being separated from the temple – which held the holiness of god. He was a smart man who had worldly knowledge. He knew about international affairs and history. He was very scholarly. He knew about all sorts of general matters of culture from shipbuilding to literature.

More than any other prophet he was directed to involve himself personally in the divine word by acting it out in prophetic symbolism. So, as we can expect, there are many tangible references given in the visions he was shown. God speaks to Ezekiel through these visions, and Ezekiel then shares them with those in exile, those to whom the message is sent and to us today.

In our scripture, god is showing Ezekiel a vision about wading out into the deep waters. I can't help but think about how this relates to the spiritual waters of the spirit-filled life. I think it's an excellent analogy of what's happening in the modern church.



About a year ago I had to read possibly the toughest piece of literature I have ever read in my life! It's called the passion of Perpetua or the acts of Perpetua and Felicitas. Vibia Perpetua was a young, pregnant noblewoman who had converted to Christianity. At the time, the roman emperor had forbidden the religion and imprisoned every person who broke that edict. If you remember correctly, those were the days of the roman coliseum and its gruesome public execution games. As much as the judge and the officials begged Perpetua to recant her belief, she would not – even knowing what would happen to her. She kept a journal recounting her trial and imprisonment that was continued by a contemporary who described Perpetua's graphic gruesome and detailed death in the arena.

I mention this because that was the passion of the early Christians. They were threatened with their very lives and still they persisted in praying, praising and worshiping god. They did this even in the face of death. It offers extreme perspective.

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Today's modern church looks very different. There's one on every corner and over 75% of folks don't attend. Those who do attend do so when it is convenient. Commitment in the modern church has fallen into the category of volunteering for non-profits or for our child's school activities. It is another activity on the calendar. Another obligation. We worry that we'll be sucked into a responsibility that will overshadow other things. Or, we doubt our spiritual gifts. Or maybe someone has cast a shadow of doubt on what god has called us to do. Are we afraid to commit ourselves completely?

Perhaps we think that god may require more of us than we are willing to give. We reason within ourselves that, if I don't commit to the work fully then I won't be found guilty of failing in my commitment to Christ.

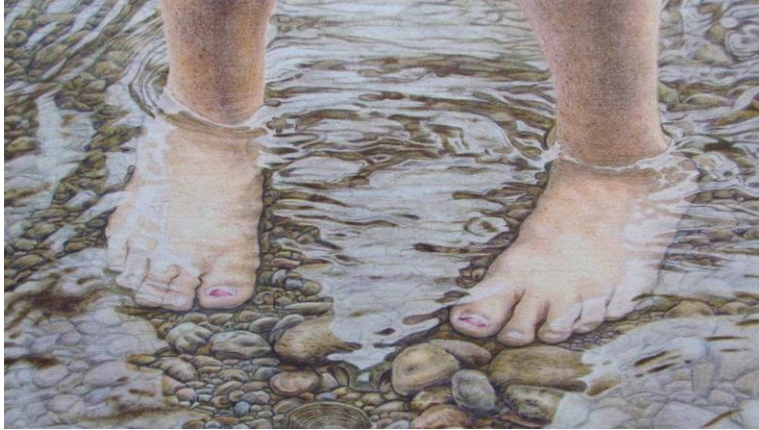


Maybe we're afraid of getting in over our head. This river of living water, coming from the throne of God, is representative of the working of the Holy Spirit in your life. When Ezekiel first saw the waters, he could not and did not go into the water alone.

We cannot enter into god's kingdom or experience the Holy Ghost in our lives unless we come god's way... through the waters where we are led or carried. God carried Ezekiel out into the water.

When the Holy Spirit deals with the life of a sinner, that sinner must respond, either in repentance or rebellion. If our response is one of repentance, then god saves us and we begin the journey through life with him.

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1. We step into the water (ankle deep), we get our feet wet. At this point in our walk with the lord we still behave the way we want to. We can behave according to our own thinking. There is very little “resistance” to our steps because we have not yet learned to recognize the voice of god as he gently leads us into a deeper relationship with him. The (ankle deep) have not yet seen the importance of being faithfully committed to the holy. As we grow in the lord and learn to trust him, he leads us into a little deeper walk with him.



2. Now we are getting (knee deep) in obedience to the call of god. Serving god in knee-deep water means that we must work a little harder, study a little more, and do a little more than other people. It's not a contest, but it is certainly a testing of our personal commitment and integrity. We stay committed to doing a job that needs to be done no matter what. Knee-deep water is a little harder to walk in and hides a lot of things that may cause us to stumble; beginning to walk in the fear of the lord does so as well.

God will begin the process of strengthening you and building your faith in him. Here is where the commitment to at least show up kicks in. But, this is just a knee-deep commitment.

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3. Then, we note a bit of concern. Ezekiel is carried out into the water until it became waist deep. Now the going gets tougher. The demands upon your time, energy and commitment really cut into your already busy schedule. What is god doing? How are you supposed to juggle all your important obligations *and* god? Now you are a disciple and you are called to bring others to discipleship. And, now that you know god is using you for that purpose, you also know that god will hold you accountable. But, rest assured that as you try to wade out in water up to your waist that you are going to face some opposition. Have you ever tried to run fast in waist deep water? As the Holy Spirit leads you into a deeper walk with the lord, there will be obstacles in your path. There will be those who will not commit themselves and will tell you that you are foolish for being so radical for the things of god. There will be those who won't support you. There will always be those who only wade out ankle deep or who don't even step into the water at all. These are usually the ones who try to discourage those who will step out further for god.



4. Finally, Ezekiel was carried out into water that was too deep for him to touch bottom // and he had to swim. When you get committed to god enough that even the plans that you make are scary, that's when you are getting into this deepest walk with the lord. That's the place where you must learn to depend upon the leading of the Holy Spirit more than ever because you know you can't do what god has called you do on your own. There is no magic formula; there is no guarantee that your life will be easy. The only assurance we have is that we are with god and we have eternal life and if we are answering god's call, god will be there! When you are this deep, you have gone beyond your own ability. And the ability of other human resources. This is a place of great power and prayer and faith. This is the deep spiritual water. Ezekiel had gone so far from the shore that he could no longer walk back. Wherever the river flowed, that was where Ezekiel was going. The current was so strong and the volume of water was so great that Ezekiel was in over his head. //still god was carrying him and there was no danger of the prophet drowning. God was still in control of the water and of the life of the prophet.

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When I was little, I had a reoccurring dream that I could breathe under water. It was natural. I couldn't figure out how people could drown or not know how to do this. I would get in the bathtub at night and try it out, certain that I could do it. I believe that is the same for those who are in the deep spiritual waters. There's no fear of drowning because they can breathe under water. God is their breath, and it's exhilarating!



Most Christians will never experience the joy, fulfillment, trust and love for god that comes with this kind of commitment because they love the safety of the shore too much. They refuse to leave their comfort zone. They refuse to stretch and grow beyond what they can see.

Their faith is never exercised to the point that they have complete peace no matter what the world throws at them. This is what true spiritual maturity is all about! It is about coming to the end of ourselves and realizing just how big god really is, and that there is no way that we could ever do it on our own. Suddenly our head goes under and we breathe...Just as easily as we could on shore. Even more so because the true breath of god is in our lungs.

God wants us to lose sight of ourselves, our man-made goals, our fleeting ambitions, our foolish plans, and he wants us to be totally, 100% surrendered to him and his will for our lives.

I know we can say, “Well, look at how that turned out for Perpetua!” Ok, fair enough. But when we're talking about eternity being a beach and our life here on earth a grain of sand, Perpetua stepped out into the deep, secure in who would be carrying her.

The god-kind of life is elusive to the ankle-deep people, because they will never catch the vision for what god wants to do. They will never have complete trust and faith in god to accomplish those things that seem so impossible. Nor is it for the waist deep people. These people don't believe that they'll survive the deep waters. Ezekiel says about god that, "he brought me through the deep waters."

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One thing that many Christians never realize is that a deeper commitment, wading deeper and deeper into a strong relationship with Jesus and allowing the holy spirit to have complete control of their lives, helps them to stay close to god, and brings something completely foreign to this world: the peace that passes all understanding... a deep and vibrant joy despite our happiness or lack thereof.

What about you right now? How's the water? Step in and get out into the deep. Don't worry about the sharks, the jellyfish or the waves that may come. Jesus stands, hand outstretched, ready to deliver us through the deep waters. Amen!