

Go away Lord Jesus

In preparing for this message, I came across this quote by James Thurber:

All men should strive to learn before they die, what they are running from, and to, and why.

In my search to learn more about these words, I was led to a young woman's internet blog. She had these words from James Thurber at the top. From the content, she seems capable. Her picture, included on the blog page, shows her looking down, hair over half her face. She's pretty. At first, I didn't notice that the quote was simply the top title of her blog, so I read, looking for how in the world she would use these words. What meaning did they hold for her, I wondered?

She wrote about her frustration with clutter in her house, a wedding dress she had bought, plans for her wedding, her fiance, Robby.

And then, there's this entry:

I've decided I'm in serious need of some time away from this house. And when I say away, I mean away. Like out of this city, maybe out of this state. Last night just made me realize just how stressed out I've become and how it seems everyone is so busy focusing on their problems, that they don't see all of mine...

*Last night was an eye opener for me. I cried for the longest time and Robby just held me. I know he hates it when I cry because he feels helpless as to what he should do, but sometimes it just gets to be too much and I can't help but cry. To put it in the words I used last night, "**I hurt. All the time.**"*

She ends her blog thinking she might soon visit her sister in Vegas.

What meaning did the words hold for her? She never said. At least on this day she wasn't yet able to see what she was running from or to and why. She had only a sense, as she cried in her fiance's arms, that she shouldn't hurt so much.

After Peter's long day of fishing but catching nothing, while he was working to finish—to clean the nets so he might go lie down, Jesus arrived. Jesus sat down in the frustrated Peter's boat and requested that this tired man row him out a little from shore.

Now Simon Peter was first introduced in Luke in 4: 38 and 39. Jesus had come to his house and cured his mother in law from a high fever. Notably, she responds to being healed by immediately getting up and serving them.

So Peter is willing to play along for awhile. He says nothing about rowing Jesus out from the shore to give Jesus room to speak to the crowds. But when Jesus finishes with his teaching and Peter is ready to call it a day, Jesus tells him to do more... “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.”

I love that phrase, “put out into the deep water.” The Greek word for deep is *bathos*.

Here are two other places where *bathos* is used...

Ephesians 3: 18 I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

and

1 Corinthians 2: 10 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths (*bathos*) of God.

Simon Peter put out into the deep water....

Work Peter is willing to do. He silently rows Jesus out from the shore and tends to the boat as Jesus teaches. But when Jesus suggests he move into the deep water, metaphorically, into the deep things of God, he retorts: *Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing*. Peter’s initial response to moving deeper into the things of God is resistance—a suggestion that it won’t do any good.

Before I was a minister, I was a math teacher. I was young. I worked hard. The principal changed during the year. One girl refused to do anything but curse at me and the junior high boys, during a standardized test, were literally climbing the walls. That day, I stood just outside my classroom, trying to gather my wits again, trying to not break down. I prayed. When I entered into the classroom again it was still chaos. Somehow, I didn’t cry. I started thinking about volunteering for a year in a place I could make a difference,

Put out into the deep water...

In that same year I taught a boy whose face shined with light. He was bald, the result from his treatment for leukemia. He was absent for weeks at a time. But when he would return, his smile would bring me joy. We liked each other. It was a rare thing that year for me to feel anything akin to like from my students.

When it came time for grades, the numbers said he should receive a “F”...too many missed assignments. I remember pondering do I give a higher grade because he might not live to see college? Or do I give the grade he earned because he will, someday, be held to the high standards?

Teacher training had not taught me what to do. I was 23. I didn't want to let the system down. I didn't want to think about an 11 year old dying. I filled in the bubble with the “F.”

His mom came to my class soon after. That's the first time I consciously looked into the eyes of a mother who was living with the reality that she would someday, not too far in the future, lose her son.

She made me see that the grade, whatever standards I was to hold to, didn't matter as much as keeping that light shining in his face. What a difference it would make for him, she said, to get a “D.”

I changed his grade, and cried.

I understand why Peter resists going deeper. Like me, he's ready to give in to reason—the numbers must be obeyed...the fish just aren't there. This school isn't a place where I can make a difference. He's ready to call it a day, as was I, to do his duty and to get away. The problem is Jesus is in the boat. Simon Peter allowed Jesus to get into his boat.

Now the boat is an early Christian symbol for the church. The net is the gospel. The fish symbolize those who are to be gathered into God's kingdom.

We as a church have to deal with the fact that Jesus is here, in our boat, asking us to go deeper.

Despite his misgivings, Simon Peter obeys Jesus and puts down the net into deep water. The net comes back so full that another boat is needed to pull up the catch. Even then it is too much. The nets are breaking. I imagine chaos, the men yelling “pull, pull!”...wait, stop, the fish are breaking our net, pull on the other side...come on...we don't want to lose them. Peter, where are you?!

In the midst of this bedlam is the most tender scene of all.

Peter falls to his knees, and begs, “Go away from me Lord for I am a sinful man.”

You'll note that Jesus is no longer master, teacher. Jesus is Lord, holy one of God.

Go away Lord, for I am a sinful man.

Here it is--an excuse to stop pulling, a reason to say “no” to the Lord. Oh how we use sin to push away that which seeks to make us whole...holy...to resist going deeper, to resist trust, to resist becoming the hands, feet, indeed to resist becoming the heart of God.

We are a bit like the woman who shared on the internet, thinking we are honestly baring our souls while we are pushing away the one who is willing to hold us close when tears come...

All men should strive to learn before they die, what they are running from, and to, and why.

We run from Jesus. Churches often run from Jesus.

Without Jesus, we won't need to go as deep, we can hold our tears inside, we can walk through life lightly. Without Jesus we can end the day when the day is done. Without Jesus we don't have to grow that we might lead others into the kingdom.

Go away from me Lord for I am a sinful man.

It's too late, Peter; it's too late, church. You obeyed Jesus. You know what it is like to put down your net into the deep water when you really should be home eating a hot supper. Your hands are already on the net, and while you may want to let go at times, he isn't going to let you go.

So as the angel once spoke to Mary, Jesus speaks to Simon, Jesus speaks to the church... “Do not be afraid.”

Do not be afraid...of that which pulls you into deeper water...of that which hurts...of that which brings tears...

For there, in the bathos of God, you will be given what you need...

To live

To fish for people

To gather one and then another and then another into
God's kingdom

If it seems like a lot of work, it's your fault. You let Jesus in the boat.

Prayer:

Lord, Jesus

Take us deeper

Into the depths of holy love

Fill us with your desire

To not let one escape the net of your kingdom

Your kingdom without end.

We pray the prayer of Jesus: