

Thomas R. Cook
St. Stephen's Church – Edina, Minnesota
8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. Celebrations of the Holy Eucharist
The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – July 14, 2019

“Go For Depth”*

Scripture: Luke 10:25-37; 5Pentecost C (Proper 10)

I remember when I was a little boy the local city pool would open up in the summertime, and sometimes my mom would load up my brothers and me for a day at poolside. And one thing I loved about this pool was that it was so big. Now granted, I wasn't so big myself back then, but this pool seemed so big to me, big enough to have a little of everything. It had a slide on one side near the middle. On one end it was shallow enough to wade around comfortably, but all the way down at the other side, that pool got so deep I could hardly imagine swimming down there. It was so deep at that end that two diving boards were set along the edge, and one of them was at least ten feet high over the water, and people could dive off of there and not even worry about hitting the bottom.

And little guy that I was, I would wade around in the shallow end of the pool, but I would see all those big kids way down on the other end splashing and diving and going under water and having fun, and I would start to walk in that direction, drawn

* This sermon is influenced by William C. Martin, [The Art of Pastoring: Contemplative Reflections](#) (Decatur, Georgia: CTS Press, 1994), 67. “A pastor's life is spread so thin. What is lost is depth. Go deep, not thin.”

by the mysteries of the deep end. And pretty soon the water was up to my knees, but I didn't care; and then it was up past my waist, and still I would walk on; and then my arms were under with the water up to my neck, but that didn't stop me. But that next step or two was the test, and down I went, under the water, and I would sort of bob my way back to the surface and turn around and paddle my way back to a place where I could feel the bottom of the pool under my feet again. Whew! I may not have made it all the way to the deep end, but I felt safer with my feet on the bottom and my head above water. And for a long time, that shallow end of the pool is right where I stayed.

Not Jesus. He jumps in right down there in the deep end. Think of that poor, unsuspecting lawyer who tests Jesus one day with a question for which he already knows the answer. That lawyer is just wading around in the shallow water, pretty safe and comfortable, no big problems, firm footing, calling out to Jesus, who is treading water in the deep end:

"Hey, Jesus! What do I have to do to get eternal life?"

The reply comes back: "Well, you already know that one, don't you? What did you learn in school?"

“Love God with all your heart and soul and strength and mind. Oh, and love your neighbor as yourself.” Good answer. Firm footing. The water here isn’t too deep and the bottom holds up the lawyer just fine. He’s having a good day, but he can’t resist another question.

“But, Jesus, who exactly is my neighbor?”

“Ah, now you’ve asked a real question, sir. For that one, you’ll have to swim out here to me in the deep end.”

“Uh-oh. What if I don’t like to swim? What if the water makes me nervous when I can’t feel the firm bottom of the pool right under my feet? What’s Jesus up to?” But out goes the lawyer to where the water is over his head, and when he gets to Jesus, he hears this: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers...” The “answer” the lawyer gets is the story of the so-called “good” Samaritan. The lawyer hears about someone who helps another person in need, a good man who binds up the wounds of a person dying on the side of the road, who puts him on his own animal to ride while he walked along beside, who gets him a room in the inn to recover and agrees to pay whatever the cost. It’s a good story, but not too deep. Yet. I mean, anyone who knows anything about Jesus could figure that he wants us to show that kind of compassion, right?

But swim down a little deeper below the surface of the water, and some new things come to light, some challenging things. Turns out that passerby who helps the beaten man at the side of the road isn't the first person to come along. In fact, he is the third. Two men passed by before him and didn't lift a finger. What's more, these were religious men, pillars of society, important and respected, and, apparently, too beholden to their positions to care for a derelict on the side of the road. And this third man, the Samaritan, well... here's where the water gets really deep and the lawyer is going to have a hard time staying afloat. See, the Samaritan is the worst possible sort of person in the eyes of that lawyer. Jesus picked *as a good example* a man who the lawyer would assume to be terrible, a lowlife... the most detestable, basest, ugliest, most unworthy, lowest sort of person to ever walk the face of the earth. The Jews despised the Samaritans, their cousins really, yet they considered them outcasts, mongrels, impure, and, as far as most Jews were concerned, unfaithful and unworthy of notice. Yet in Jesus' story, it is this supposedly despicable man who does all the right things. He shows compassion for the man attacked and left for dead on the side of the road. He does his best to heal him. He gives him a place to stay. He provides sustenance for a time. "Who is my neighbor?" the lawyer asks from the shallow end. "Even the one you think most unworthy of your care," answers Jesus from the deep end. That one is your neighbor.

And I imagine the lawyer feels like he is sinking under water in the deep end when he has to admit that Jesus is right, that the man who acts like a good neighbor, the one who shows mercy upon a broken, frightened, helpless, unknown human being, is none other than... a Samaritan. And I imagine that Jesus reaches out a hand, pulls the lawyer to the surface, sets his feet in shallower water where he can stand again on his own and says: "Now... go and do likewise."

You know, the lawyer's problem isn't what he didn't know. He knows he is called to love God and neighbor, just like we know the same thing. But what Jesus helps the lawyer understand, and what Jesus challenges us with, is just how deep that love of God and neighbor might take us. In every choice and challenge we face, followers of Jesus are called to respond like neighbors to the person in need, and any person can be our neighbor.

You know, before we can really address so much of what ails us, we're going to have to get out of the shallow end of the spiritual pool where it's safe. I believe Jesus calls us to seek depth: depth of understanding, depth of relationship, depth of faith, depth of sacrifice, depth of love. Maybe we think we can't swim there in the deep end, but I have no doubt that we will not swim alone; he will be there to help us.

So what is it that we *know*... that needs to turn to what we *do*? We know that we are to have compassion for others. We know we are to love our enemies. We know that we are to pray without ceasing, to share our means, to care for the suffering, to show mercy to the stranger. We know we are to look after our families and care for ourselves too. We know we are to be peacemakers. We know we are to forgive. We know we are to open our hearts to those we do not understand. We know we are to love God and love our neighbor.

So, go, and do likewise.