

October 27, 2019
Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
Reformation Sunday

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THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SCUBA

Psalm 90 God's eternity – human mortality

¹Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. ²Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. ³You turn us back to dust, and say, "Turn back, you mortals." ⁴For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night. ⁵You sweep them away; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning; ⁶in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers. ¹²So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.

Psalm 139:1; 6-8

¹ O Lord, you have searched me and known me. ⁷ Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. ⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SCUBA

INTRODUCTION

It was by necessity that I first became a certified SCUBA diver. I had to for the sake of search and rescue on the waterfront of Camp Henry. A few years back, I renewed that certification and have reveled in descending to the depths ever since. I've been working on my rescue diver certification and recently was able to frolic with humpback whales off the coast of Columbia. As Jacques Cousteau put it:

"The sea, once it casts its spell, holds one in its net of wonder forever." Jacques Cousteau, *Life and Death in a Coral Sea*

My Mentor used to tease me about ascending to the Mountain heights with my skis and going deep with my scuba tank. Dr. William Crompton Bennett would say: "Jeffrey,

(experiencing) the heights and the depths – everything you need to weather ordained ministry...”

SCUBA

Self-Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus. Your source of air comes from a tank of condensed air (3000 PSI) – but it is a finite amount of air to breathe. You only have so many breaths. It is essential to make the most of each one of them. You only have one tank – one life. It is not about the destination, it is about making the most of the moment, the journey, the sights, the sounds, the colors, the textures, the life forms and the way they adapt.

My dive master likes to say: “Tenemos más vida que tiempo” - We have more life than we have time. SCUBA is a lot like life – today I’d like to offer some random reflections and revelations on diving and what it can teach us about living the life of faith.

I – ENCUMBRANCE OR EQUIPMENT

First, there are the burdens of setting up your equipment, doing safety checks and (ugh) lugging it to the launch – tank, buoyancy vest, wetsuit, regulator, flippers, mask, underwater camera, safety surface marker, lead weights... They teach us that burdens (and we all carry them) should not be viewed as deterrents, encumbrances, or inconveniences. They are essential supports and we need to experience them in order to keep us moving forward.

II- COMMUNITY

A second revelation has to do with community. It is never a good idea to dive alone. It is best to dive with others. They are there to help you see things you might miss. They are there for you in times of difficulty. You likewise provide the same for them. So it is true for all of us in the life of faith.

III - JOURNEY

When one begins a dive, just as when one begins life - one does not know up, down, left, or right. It is important that we find our boundaries, our bearings, a sense of direction. Most of the problems in scuba diving are a result of the diver themselves. Take responsibility. Know your limits. Otherwise you become shark bait (shark bait oh ha ha). Most importantly, stay calm – do not be anxious.

As one enters the mystery of another world, it becomes increasingly evident that it is constantly changing – embrace change, or become increasingly frustrated and unhappy. Jesus said: “Do not be anxious ...” he also said: “Set your troubled hearts at rest... Trust in God always. Trust also in me...” To really enjoy a good dive one needs to face their fears with a giant stride into the unknown.

IV – REVERENCE YOUR SURROUNDINGS

As you take that giant stride into the unknown, never forget to look around and enjoy the scenery. Reverence and preserve all ecosystems. Don't dredge things up from the bottom, it will only create problems for you in the future; it will cloud your visibility and make it really difficult to view the finer, more precious and important things in life. And, by the way, while you drift over that reef below you, be sure not to take the little things for granted, they are often the most important and enjoyable things in life.

V - PERSPECTIVE

The ocean is immense. Understand your insignificance – and your place in the larger scheme of things. Realize that there is realm far greater than you alone. When one dives, there is no talking, just the sound of your breathing. Listening is the key to understanding. As the Psalmist said: "Be still and know that I am God..." Find perspective.

VI – DIVE DEEP

Go deep. Don't be confined to the superficial. Don't stick too close to the shore. Explore the depths. Said the English poet John Dryden: "He who would search for pearls must dive below."

VII - NAVIGATE

Know the currents and learn to navigate them lest you get gashed by the sharp coral.

VIII - PRESSURE

Manage the pressure. There is an immense amount of it the deeper you go. Equalize. Regulate yourself.

Which leads to the most obvious – Breathe. Remember, just keep breathing. But Breathe wisely. Inhale and exhale. Don't panic. The way you breathe affects others.

IX - TOXICITY

There comes a point in ones' descent that the body absorbs nitrogen. It can become toxic, especially if not regulated. Toxicity abounds. That's when one knows the need to ascend and aim high.

X - ASCEND

And, as you ascend – remember from whence you came. Know where your boat is – [the image of the boat (the Ark) has long been one for the church.] Find your boat.

In your boat is your captain. Keep God as your captain – God will take your tank, and weights, and flippers, and encumbrances.

CONCLUSION

Then there is a point, like all things, that the dive draws to a completion. The adventure is over. It is finished. Yes, there are missed opportunities, maybe some regrets, but hopefully if one takes a clue from the Gospel according to SCUBA; the time will have been fun, fulfilling, fruitful; and maybe you will have given back or paid it forward. (cut a creature of the sea free from the entanglements of nets, or removed some plastic suffocating the reef.)

Someone put it this way:

We dive not to escape life, but for life not to escape us.

Jesus had a limited time on this earth ... Look how he made the most of it...

Shalom Chaverim sung

Pastoral Prayer

God of all the seasons. In the glory of springtime we acknowledge that you are the origin of life.

In the warmth and light of the summer in our lives prepare us to burst forth into activity and to make hay while the sun shines.

In the autumns of our lives, reflect to us your constant presence in the midst of change.

Harvest the fruit we bear for your Kingdom.

In the darkening days of our winters, appoint unto us the warmth and glow of shared lives.

Heal our pains of loss and separation. Celebrate with us the joys of new beginnings

In every season, Lord, confirm in us, your presence, and love, and patient care;

Gracious God, we come before you to ask your blessing in this change of seasons.

Give us trust to enter the unknown with courage, to let go of the familiar, when we are called to let go, to move into what seems like an unknown chapter; vision to discern the way and the assurance of your grace.

Calm our fears and nourish our courage and confidence in you as we move into the mystery ahead.

As we traverse the hours you give us daily, grace our footsteps, that they may follow those of Christ. When the sunlight fades and our bodies grow weary, let all we have been and done throughout the day serve as our prayer of thanks, through Jesus Christ our lord we pray, in the words he taught us to pray.