

Who Taught You to Swim?
Sermon Text June 18, 2023

Last week, I was on vacation with my oldest daughter, Galina, her husband, Alan, and their three children – Zoey, 9; Wyatt, 6, and Odin, 10 months. It wasn't exactly a relaxing vacation but it was very important and fun. Galina and Alan have a boat, a hot tub, and like spending summer days at a lake near Rapid City, South Dakota. They have done a good job teaching their two older children how not to drown. Christi and I told each other that by the time Zoey and Wyatt leave for SD, they will be much better swimmers. And it worked! Zoey shed her life jacket and was swimming all around our pool. Wyatt felt quite comfortable in the deep end and is on his way to being a fish just like his older sibling. This got me thinking, I don't think the role of parent is to teach their children to swim – they teach them how not to drown, but, to swim, that takes someone else.

I have two questions for you: do you know how to swim? If so, who taught you? I bet it wasn't your parents. The role of parent is to teach us how to not drown; but, to swim, the instructor has to be willing to let their student get close to drowning. As a parent, that's just something we're not wired to do.

My swim instructor's name is Carrie. She taught my brother and I at the YMCA and about six other kids. We all lined up on the side of the pool. She'd have us swim out about twenty feet to her and then back to the wall. There was a lot of peer pressure because my brother and the other kids were watching. She had the attitude of *if you swim out to me or not, either way is fine*. I'm sure she would care if we drowned; but, her attitude was rather callous... unlike a good parent who would have compassion; and then not be a good swim instructor.

My second swim instructor was Bobby at Camp Huston, an Episcopal camp in the north cascades of Washington State. He taught me how to be a lifeguard. Bobby intentionally pushed us to the point of drowning... and throwing up. ... and then drowning again. He wanted us to witness the signs of drowning in each of us and to know the panic of what it was like. And I still remember. He also wanted us to know our limits really well so that we would not end up drowning when trying to save someone. Again, he was not a parent, but an instructor. He had great compassion for swimmers and guards. He wanted to make sure we could do everything to save a life and our own too.

Who taught you compassion?

There's a debate going on with child psychologists sociologists about compassion. Are we born with it; do we learn it? The loose consensus is that every, most, children are born with capacity in the brain for compassion. We're already wired for it. Many think you can't access that wiring until around five years old. Somewhere along the line your parents, mentors, teachers, pastors; someone taught you to have compassion for others; to care and to want to help others. Do you remember who taught you compassion?

I wonder who taught Jesus to have compassion. I think of Mary and Joseph as compassionate people. One hallmark of God is compassion. For sure Jesus was wired for it. I believe he learned it from Mary and Joseph and certainly from God the Father.

Chapter 55 of Isaiah tells us that God's ways are not our ways; God's thoughts are not our thoughts. God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts; God's ways are different than our ways. In that light, Jesus sees a crowd of really needy, sick, desperate people and has compassion on them. He doesn't try to get away, or ignore them, he was pulled toward them. In fact, not only was he motivated and pulled to them, he raised up leaders to help! Jesus saw the crowd, had compassion for them and said, "The harvest is great but the laborers are few."

How many of you read the NY Times this morning? Or any newspaper, or watched the news. God sees the harvest. Did you? It's great – as in immense, large, overwhelming. Did you read about the laborers? Yeah, they were few and far between. This is how Jesus sees us – helpless, harassed, like sheep without a shepherd. And he has compassion on us. He then raised up his disciples – we heard all twelve names today – he raised them up and sent them out into the harvest. These are fishermen and one tax collector. They're not farmers. But, Jesus saw in them something that they themselves could not see – they are laborers for God.

God's ways are not our ways. God can see in us things that we cannot see in ourselves. Matthew saw himself as a tax collector; Jesus saw in him an Apostle. Peter saw in himself a sinner and told Jesus to depart from him because of his sin. God's thoughts are not our thoughts. Jesus saw in Peter a chief apostle of the apostles, the rock, cornerstone of the Church.

Carrie, my swim instructor, saw something in me that I did – she saw a swimmer. Bobby saw a lifeguard in me. Jesus saw in me a priest.

What if the 21st century Church is like a YMCA. A place where we can learn to swim, to help others, to love others outside of our family. We get to try things out – singing like we've never sang before, praying like we've never prayed before, serving at the altar, being a lector, being in leadership. It's like a spiritual YMCA. But, we don't get to stay in this pool. The Lord of the Harvest is calling us out into the harvest because it is great but the laborers are few.

Like Carrie, calling me out from the comfort of the side of the pool, she's not going to let me drown but she's going to make sure I learn to swim. God is not going to let us drown when he calls us out into his Harvest. He is seeing in us things that we can't see. And, he's calling us out into the harvest. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.