

Now may I speak in the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The highlight of my week came on Thursday morning. I was at my weekly yoga class that I've been attending for five years. I walked in and there was a new woman there. And unfortunately, she was in my place. I've had the same place for five years, right in the corner, on the back row so that no one sees what I'm up to, because really no one has been bad enough to see me in Lycra early in the morning.

So I had to move forward onto the front row, and I was terrified. And halfway through the class, the instructor walked past me, which is always a good sign, walked past me to address the woman behind. And she said, pointing at me, "See how his feet are." Fantastic. Five years. Finally, I was doing something right, never before have I been pointed out as an example of how to do it. So, I'm still buzzing, because we all like to feel that we're making progress. We all want to feel that we're getting better at something, that we are moving along, that we are not just staying in the same place.

And so it is with the Christian life. We are to move forward, we're to progress, which is why that metaphor, the image of a journey is so apt for our Christian life. And Christians for centuries have talked about being on a spiritual journey. It goes right back to Pilgrim's progress, that sense that we are moving forward. We're all on a spiritual journey. We're somewhere on that journey. Some of us are just at the start. Other of us have been on it for a long time. Some of us might be thinking that we are going round in circles and exploring cul-de-sacs, and we're not making the progress we want to, but all of us are somewhere on that journey.

And it struck me this week, because I was looking, again, at that gospel reading, that wherever we are on our spiritual journey, that the story that we've just heard from the Gospel of Luke has something to say to us. So if we're at the start of our journey, we need to learn from story that the journey of faith always begins with grace. It's not that we live a good life doing worthy things that God might take an interest in us. No, the message of the Bible is clear that we are saved by God's grace, God's amazing grace. God

always takes the initiative with us. God's mercy and grace come as a gift, not as a reward.

Saint Paul knew that better than anyone. He writes in the Epistle that we heard, about how he's unfit to be an apostle because he persecuted the first Christians. But he says, by the grace of God, I am what I am. God reached out and touched Saint Paul's life. When he was on that road to Damascus, he had a life changing experience as he met with Jesus. And St. Paul's life showed he met God in his grace when he was least deserving of that grace. His faith wasn't because he did the right thing. God met him in grace because He came as a gift.

And our gospel reading is a vivid illustration of this notion of grace. Simon Peter and his mates have been fishing all night long and caught nothing. And at the start of the story, they're washing their nets, and they're packing up after a fruitless night's fishing. They're about to go home, yet when they did what Jesus suggested, they caught so many fish that their nets were breaking and tearing at the seams. The number of the fish they caught did not rise in proportion to the effort that they put into the fishing. And this points to the scandal at the heart of the Christian gospel. We don't get what we deserve. God deals with us on the basis of grace. God does not judge us or treat us on the basis of what we do or how hard we try, but on how we respond to his invitation in Jesus Christ. There is nothing we can do to win God's approval. We are justified by his grace not works.

So in our two readings today, both Peter and Paul experience God's grace, and they actually respond in a similar way. Both recognize their unworthiness before God. Saint Paul says, "I am unfit to be an apostle". Peter says, "go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man". There's something enormously liberating about grasping this notion of grace: It frees us to be honest with ourselves and our failings. We can see that our worth and our value depend not on how hard we try or what we achieve, but rather on our relationship with God. God doesn't love us because we are valuable. We are valuable because God loves us.

The gospel story also speaks to those who are already on the journey of faith. What we see in the story is that we make progress on our spiritual journey as we continue to follow Jesus' lead. When Jesus said to Peter, "Go out again and let down the nets" Peter was tired. He had no reason to believe that the lake was suddenly awash with fish. In fact, that was unlikely to be the case, which is why they fished at night and not in the day. And Peter knew that, because he was a professional fisherman, and Jesus was a preacher. But when Jesus said, "Put down your nets for a catch." Peter replied, "If you say so." He didn't say this because he had reason to believe that there were fish out there to be caught, him saying it was a step of faith. It was a case of reluctant obedience. Jesus told him to do it, and he did it.

And this decision changed the course of Peter's life. It wasn't based on a great moment of clarity or insight. It was instead based on simple trust. Peter took a step of faith and it was a giant step towards his journey of faith. This story ends with Peter leaving his nets and following Jesus, becoming a fisher of people. "If you say so", are words of discipleship. It's not saying, "I understand it". Or "I can see clearly now". Or even, "I agree with it". "If you say so" is simply saying, "I'll trust".

Finally, there's an invitation in this gospel for those who've been on the journey of faith for a long time, it's an invitation to go deeper. Jesus said to Peter, "Put out your nets into the deep water." I've noticed that the older I get the colder the ocean seems to be. I don't know if you've noticed that. I'll go down to La Jolla shores and I'll spend a long time just paddling in the water in the shallow water. I can't get myself together to take that deep breath and dive into the surf and head out. Yet after the initial shock, that's always worth it. Swimming is always better than paddling, but I spend far too much time spiritually paddling. There's a certain comfort to be had in paddling around in familiar unchallenging spiritual waters. But let's be spiritually adventurous. Head off into the deep this Lent.

I was very pleased to see that Sir Edmund Shackleton, the great British explorer, has been in the news this week. He's a great British hero, complete lunatic, and people, equally barmy, are trying to raise his ship, the

Endurance, which is under ice 3,000 meters in the Antarctic.

But anyway, Shackleton, a great explorer and adventurer, and the Endurance is there because he was doing something mad cap in the Antarctic, and it got crushed by the ice. And they had to abandon the ship. And five of them went with Shackleton to south Georgia, and 22 of them stayed behind on the ice. And after four attempts in many months, they did come back and rescue the men who'd been left on the ice. And when he came back from the trip, Shackleton, who was always up for another adventure, wrote this notice in The Times of London, "Men wanted for hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful, honor and recognition in case of success." And the ad was simply signed, Shackleton. And hundreds of men replied to the advert, all wanting to go with him on his next trip. They were responding to a sense of adventure. They knew it was more fun to head off into the deep than paddle in the shallows.

It's good to be adventurous to dive into the deep waters of faith. And so this Lent, which is fast approaching, is a good time for us to resolve to do that. What you think could we do in Lent to push us out a bit into the deep water? Maybe it's starting a spiritual discipline that we've not done before, like reading the Bible every day, or fasting? Maybe it might be attending one of the Lenten courses, that will be on offer.

I'm doing something that I don't normally do, that I'm resolving to read a theology book with over 600 pages in it. Maybe we could pursue silence and meditation, invite the Holy Spirit to come to us and fill us. Maybe we could pray with one of the clergy who are always in the chapel, just over here, during communion. Maybe we could talk to someone else about our faith, or invite a neighbor to an Easter service. What's the thing we could do which would encourage us to go deeper in Lent. So there we have it, three things we need if we're to make progress on our Christian journey, grace, trust and adventure. Let's pack these things in our spiritual rucksack and boldly head into Lent. Amen.