

## The Thrill of Skill *John 1:29-42* | 1/15/2017

Sometimes you need a big kahuna. Heartland did. When she was a kid, Heartland — that's her name — heard the story about how the master water-walker — Jesus — ripped it up on the inland surf of the Sea of Galilee. Heartland wondered about water-walking — how cool a trick is that? As a child she imagined a wavy, slippery feeling beneath her bare feet; a slick surface splashing through her toes, riding atop liquid as if it were a fluid solid.

Her water-walking fantasy was a slightly silly aspiration. Her next best choice turned out to be surfing. So, in search of an expert teacher, she booked herself into an adult surfing camp. Off she flew to Maui, spending five days building her skills for personal thrills as a surfer newbie from expert shredders on a sandy beach.

For five amazing days she was the dutiful apprentice of surfing masters. From them she learned skills and felt the thrill of wave riding. By imitating their moves, by learning their teachings, Heartland did passably well in her own way. And now she's stoked about what she learned.

Having the right teacher helps. With practice, Heartland might become a teacher someday, too. She knows that *to learn a new skill in the right way, she had to go to where top teachers live.*

If you want to learn a new skill, say, surfing, for instance, you could buy a surfboard, read a surfing how-to-book, watch a surfing instructional video, and then give it a go on the rolling surf of 2-to 4-footers by yourself. Trouble is — you'll likely be wiping out more often than not. Eventually you might learn surfing through trial and error. You'll get the thrill, but miss out on the skill. If you're not careful, you'll probably pick up a few bad habits, too.

There is a shortcut to learning new skills — find a competent teacher. Find a master — someone who has the know-how, and then go to that person to learn.

Andrew the apostle wanted to learn about God, so he started following John the Baptist and became a willing student. Later on, when the Christ himself came walking by, Andrew ditched John the Baptist, grabbed his brother Peter and said, "I've found the Messiah!" Together the brothers went off on the greatest adventure ever — an adventure about which stories are still told.

Peter and Andrew knew what they wanted to learn, so they went to where the master lived. All the better *that Jesus invited them to join him "where he was staying"* (John 1:39). It's a good start for any novice to get an invitation to hang with the greatest teacher of them all, and to have the chance to learn the skills that change lives. Andrew seizes the opportunity and pulls Peter along for the ride.

It's clear in the story that those brothers know what they want. They want God. They want the Messiah. They know with whom they wish to apprentice — the Rabbi Jesus, the Messiah. They found the teacher who'll give them unsurpassed instruction. There's no point in learning from the second best when the best is available.

There's an old saying, "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear." Peter and Andrew were ready. Which raises the question: Are we ready? Are we willing to go where Jesus lives and to learn?

It's important that we follow Jesus as a student follows a master. That mentor-disciple relationship will help us become the servants of God we're intended to be. The reason we do this is because we know that a disciple learns by watching and repeating what she sees. Jesus teaches the brothers to imitate him. That's what a good rabbi, a good master, does. He teaches by example, by explanation, by allowing for mistakes, by giving correction and by passing on the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed.

In rabbinical Judaism, the whole purpose of being a particular rabbi's disciple was to train so well that, when you were working out in public, anyone who was watching might see the hand of your rabbi in your training, or hear his words or his phrasing in your speech, or witness the wisdom or compassion of your rabbi in your actions. The teacher's skill is passed on to the student, person to person, master to apprentice, on into the next generation, and then to the next. We listen, watch, and imitate.

The apostle Paul positions himself as a student of a master, and at the same time a mentor for others: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1) and "be imitators of God, as beloved children" (Ephesians 5:1). The Bible calls for imitation. If you want God fully in your life, if you want to be as faithful as you can, if you want expertise in Christian living, imitate Christ.

Furthermore, Paul says, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). To get the mind of Christ, imitate Christ; learn to think like Christ, act with love and compassion like Christ, do what he did, live like he did, trust God like he did. We do this by accepting the invitation of the Christ to come to the place where he is staying.

So how long has it been since you've been to Jesus' house? I don't just mean "going to church"? I mean really, seriously, intentionally spending time listening to, watching and imitating Jesus.

Jesus invites us to his house, but we say, "Love to. Can't right now. Places to go and people to see, but count me in."

Jesus invites us to his house, but we say, "You know, we've got to get together some day. I don't know why we don't seem to connect. Tell you what, I'm going to check my calendar and then I'll get back to you. But we really must make a point of it."

Jesus invites us to his house, but we say, "Hey, great idea. But why don't you come over to our place first? That would really be a bit more convenient. Let us know. We'll need a little lead time to clean it up before you arrive." You get the idea.

But if we are going to take Jesus up on his offer, we need to know where Jesus lives. So here are some directions.

Jesus lives where the poor are. So consider volunteering to work with our Food Pantry, because that's where you'll find Jesus. Jesus lives where the children are because they're special people of the kingdom of God and they need teachers and people who will spend time with them. Jesus lives with those who have no one to love them. Seek them out. Jesus lives in the community of faith where worship and study take place. He lives here. Jesus lives in the written words of Scripture. So reading the Bible, you will find Jesus. Jesus lives in the presence of the eternal God and hears our prayers. So prayer is another way to go where Jesus is.

We can't learn surfing, mountain climbing, sky-diving, spelunking, piano playing, painting — and the like — from books alone. We can learn *about* those things, but we can't learn to *do* those things without a teacher, a role model, a master. We learn by being in the presence of skilled teachers and doing what they show and say.

Jesus has invited us over. He wants to be our teacher, our mentor, our role model, and our Savior.

Let's tell him we're coming.

## PASTOR KEITH