



**MERCY  
GLOBAL  
PRESENCE**

# Putting Out into the Deep

**Elizabeth Dowling rsm (ISMAPNG)**

In Luke 5:4, Jesus tells Simon to 'put out into the deep'. For me, this phrase/image quivers with significance. There is a sense in which that is what we are doing as we embark on the Mercy Global Presence process. We are going deeper into mystery where we may not see everything clearly but it is where we will find life and energy. The Greek word **bathos** is translated in Luke 5:4 as the 'deep', and cognates of **bathos** also appear in Luke 6:48; and 24:1. In this paper, I intend to explore the idea of going into 'the deep' and link this with an understanding of 'deep incarnation'.

*(NRSV Luke 5:1-6) Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' Simon answered, 'Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.' When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break.*



[James Tissot, Jesus Preaches in a Ship. 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Public Domain](#)

Fishing boats would have been a common sight on the Sea of Galilee (Lake of Gennesaret) in Jesus' time, since fishing was a major industry for the towns along the shore of the lake. In this story, Jesus first sits on Simon's boat and teaches the crowd and then invites Simon to

put out into **'the deep'** (5:4). Having caught nothing all night, Simon finds that he has a different experience 'in the deep', catching so many fish that the nets could barely hold them.



***Into the Deep***

© M. Southard C.S.J., [www.marysouthardart.org](http://www.marysouthardart.org). Used under licence.

In deep waters, we can literally feel out of our depth. We may not be able to touch the bottom, or even see the bottom. Mary Southard's painting, *Into the Deep*, portrays the light and energy, amid the darkness, in the deep. The bubbles are also a sign of life. Just as Peter encounters so many fish when he 'puts out into the deep' (Luke 5:4), the instruction to go into the deep (***bathos***) is an invitation to new life, new understanding, an expansion of consciousness. Peter's response is to leave everything and follow Jesus (5:11).

In Luke 6:47-48, Jesus likens someone who hears Jesus' words and acts on them to a person who dug deeply (***ebathunen***) and laid the foundation of a house on rock. Such a house is well built and will withstand attempts to shake it. Once again, Jesus invites his hearers to 'go into the deep'. Something about 'the deep' is life-giving.



Photo by [Tony Naccarato](#) on [Unsplash](#)

The final image of 'going into the deep' in the Gospel of Luke occurs in 24:1 when the women go to the tomb. 'On the first day of the week, at early dawn (*orthrou batheōs*), they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared.' In the original Greek text, (*orthrou batheōs*), the women literally come to the tomb at **deep** morning twilight. The women find themselves 'going into the deep', and the result is that they come to see with new eyes. Receiving the message that Jesus has risen (24:5), they go and tell the news to the other disciples (24:8). Once again, the journey into 'the deep' is an opportunity for expansion of consciousness. Lamentably, the women's proclamation is not believed (24:11).



[The Three Marys at the Tomb by Lorenzo Monaco \(1396\). Public Domain](#)

The Greek word *bathos* has another context, apart from those we have seen in the Gospel of Luke. *Bathos* can also have an astronomical sense, referring to a celestial distance. This context of 'going into the deep' draws us to contemplate 'deep space'. As science shows us that our universe is expanding, our 'going into the deep' of space is challenging us to expand our understanding and images of God whose creation is ongoing.



Photo by [Greg Rakozy](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Our scientific knowledge also provides an image of reciprocity in relationship to 'the deep' of space. While the invitation to 'go out into the deep' helps us to expand our consciousness of the evolving cosmos and its creator, there is also a sense in which we have 'come from the deep'. We are intimately connected to 'the deep'. The elements that make up our bodies were formed in stars. Our story is woven into the thread of the universe story. As we read in Nellie McLaughlin's theological imagining at the beginning of the September 2019 Mercy Global Presence reflections, "The story of stars and galaxies, the story of Earth in all its life forms and the human story are one. This is the magnificent outpouring of divine creativity embracing the radical unity of all life." [Introduction to *Out of Wonder: The Evolving Story of the Universe* (2016)].

During this Advent period, we are preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus. The poetic prologue of the Gospel of John states "The Word became flesh (*sarx*) and lived among us" (John 1:14). Traditional understanding of the incarnation focused on the humanity of Jesus, yet the wording of 1:14 includes all flesh (*sarx*), not just humans. In 2001, Danish theologian Niels Gregersen coined the term '**deep incarnation**' to refer to the Word's union with all of life within an evolving cosmos. [See the interview with Niels Gregersen in *God and Nature, Summer 2017*]. Since then, Gregersen and other theologians have continued to explore the implications of '**deep incarnation**'. As Elizabeth Johnson explains:

‘Deep incarnation’ understands John 1:14 to be saying that the *sarx* which the Word of God became not only weds Jesus to other human beings in the species: it also reaches beyond us to join him to the whole biological world of living creatures and the cosmic dust of which they are composed. The incarnation is a cosmic event. **(Ask the Beasts, p. 197).**

Like the substance of our own bodies, the elements that make up Jesus’ body have also come from ‘the deep’. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, we are invited to ‘go into the deep’ and expand our awareness of ‘deep incarnation’. Denis Edwards reminds us that incarnation is about more than the birth of Jesus and needs also to be understood in relation to creation and resurrection. ‘In creation, incarnation, and its culmination in resurrection, God commits God’s self to this world, to this universe and its creatures, and does this eternally’ **(Denis Edwards, Partaking of God, 62).**

Finally, let us return to the first story we explored from Luke 5. Jesus invites Simon to ‘put out into the deep’ (5:4), where he catches so many fish (5:6). Before Simon leaves everything and follows, Jesus says to him, ‘Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people’ (5:10-11). In her reflection on this story, biblical scholar Veronica Lawson RSM interprets these words as Jesus inviting us to gather in all who have fallen through the cracks and who need to be picked up in our nets. This fits well with the foci of the MIA vision statement.

*Standing with the displaced, we will model a world of welcome and inclusion.  
Actively engaged in the protection of our Common Home we will witness the sacredness of all creation.*



Photo by [Fredrik Öhlander](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Our vision requires our growing awareness to be reflected in our actions. As we ‘put out into the deep’, as we find new life and expanded consciousness in those depths, and as we live that life in sacred relationship with our Earth community in an expanding cosmos, we are growing into our Mercy Global Presence