

Into the River

by Claire Campbell

The Way of Love: GO

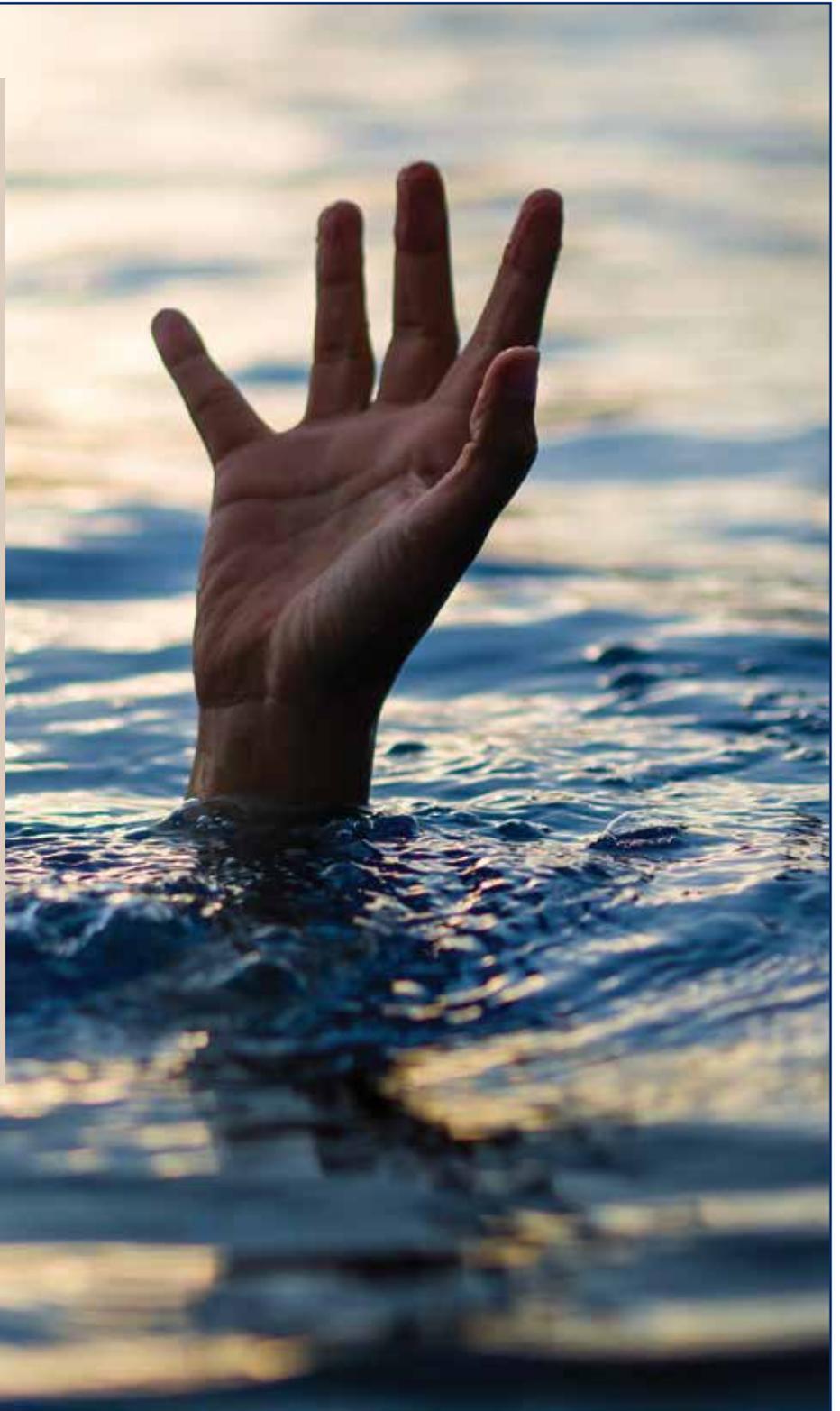
Cross boundaries, listen deeply
and live like Jesus.

*Jesus said to them, "Peace
be with you. As the Father has
sent me, so I send you." – John
20:21*

*Send them into the world in
witness to your love. – Book of
Common Prayer, 306*

As Jesus went to the highways
and byways, he sends us beyond
our circles and comfort, to witness
to the love, justice, and truth of
God with our lips and with our
lives. We go to listen with humility
and to join God in healing a
hurting world. We go to become
Beloved Community, a people
reconciled in love with God and
one another.

from [www.episcopalchurch.org/
wayoflove](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/wayoflove)



A few months ago, I came across a common Middle Eastern fable that has made me think twice before saying “let me know if you need anything.” Speaking gently and with grace during coffee hour or on the way to the parking lot after work, we so often use those words as a genuine offer to help someone during their time of need.

The subtext seems clear: we want to help. We’ll come over and clean their house. Watch their kids or walk their dogs. Make our best chicken pot pie. The offer is there — but the first part of the phrase, “let me know,” puts an undue burden on the person in need.

The fable describes a man who has fallen into a river. Caught in the currents, he fights to tread water as a crowd comes into view. On the riverbank, each member of the crowd urgently shouts to the drowning man over the roaring water, “Give me your hand! Give me your hand!”

But the man instead keeps treading water. He slips beneath the surface and pops back up, struggling to take a breath. He peddles his feet feverishly, trying to keep his chin above the waves.

Then another man comes to the riverbank and sees the drowning man. He calmly wades into the water, looks at the drowning man, and says, “Take my hand.” Together, the two come out of the river. The rescued man looks relieved as he sits on the riverbank, breathing heavily.

The crowd turns toward the rescuer, confused. “How were you able to reach him, when he didn’t heed our plea?”

The man explains, “You all asked him for something — his hand. I offered him something — my hand. A drowning man is in no position to give you anything.”

Maybe you love someone who is in the middle of a season of heartache, disillusion, confusion, or despair. Maybe you want to protect them or help them bear the load, but you’re afraid of doing the wrong thing. You want to give them their space. So you say, “let me know if you need anything.”

I’m right there with you. When my friend’s toddler was diagnosed with a life-limiting genetic disorder, I didn’t go to her. I went to Google. Can you imagine? She is my most treasured friend on the planet, and instead of calling her, I used my smartphone to search “What to do for a friend who has a special needs child?” Just like that, a stranger’s blog confirmed what the Holy Spirit urges us all to do for those who are struggling: I needed to go to her.

She was drowning, and there I was waiting for her or someone else to tell me what to do to help her. I needed to get into the river with her and offer her my hand. I couldn’t rescue her from the pain of that diagnosis. I couldn’t “fix” anything. But I could go to her.

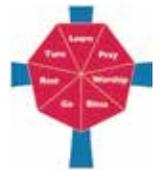
As I try to incorporate the “Go!” command into my rule of life, our post-communion prayer serves as a weekly reminder that the act of going is intimately tied to the work God has given us to do.

So I pray that I will build into my life a commitment to push past the comfortable distance we sometimes put between ourselves and the struggles other people face. That I will listen carefully and with humility to join God at work in healing a hurting world. That I won’t wait until I’ve come up with the perfect response — that I will trust the Holy Spirit’s promptings, love how Jesus loves, and go to those who are hurting.

Will you consider doing the same? *R*



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For Discernment and Reflection

- To what new places or communities is the Spirit sending you to witness to the love, justice, and truth of God?
- How will you build into your life a commitment to cross boundaries, listen carefully, and take part in healing and reconciling what is broken in this world?
- With whom will you share in the commitment to go forth as a reconciler and healer?