

STEP INTO THE WATER

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Wednesday, July 23, 2025

So, there's a little bird. And she listened to her friends: all these birds that were singing everywhere. And she loved their songs. She loved their songs! And she would sing their songs for hours, even in the shower or rain. But she would always be singing these songs that everyone else sang. And they called her a "mockingbird," because she just mocked them. She was singing *their* songs, not her own. But she loved their singing; she loved their songs.

And then one day -- actually for two weeks -- the rest of the birds all went on a cruise. [Congregants laugh] I'd like to see that cruise, wouldn't you? But they all went on a cruise together. And the forest -- where they lived -- was silent. No other bird singing. And she felt lonely; they didn't ask her, obviously. Here she was, the single bird in the whole forest; no other singing going on.

And then she stopped to listen and she could hear the wind in the trees. She could hear the rustle of the wind as it rustled the leaves. She could hear the water: the happy little brook, the water that was in the brook. And little by little, this creation started in her heart. She started, knowing that something was coming forth. And one day it just came out of her: this beautiful song that no one had ever heard before. As her delight in all of creation came forth, she was singing this song. And she sang it over and over and over. And there were no other birds. Nobody to hear her song.

And when the other birds came back, she started singing her own song. And they were amazed. They were amazed! And they called her the queen of song: this beautiful bird and what she had created just by listening. Just by listening to what was going on in the creation all around her!

It doesn't have to be created for us. We don't have to buy it or shop for it or have somebody else do it for us. But just listening: listening to what was coming forth from her as she listened to nature all around her. And it was pretty cool. She was now the queen of song.

By the way, I sing the songs that these beautiful people bring here, and nobody's ever called me a mockingbird or a queen of song. [Congregants laugh] Just thought I would tell you. That's why I only sing in the shower.

But we have a choice, dear friends. We have a choice as to what we're going to create in our lives. If we're just going to mimic other people; if we're just going to do what other people tell us to do; if we're just going to live our lives the same way day after day.

Now, I want you to know, I know that I'm not speaking to a bunch of teenagers here. There may be some hidden out there that I didn't see. But I'm not speaking to people that are just graduating from high school or getting ready to. But you know, you and I, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what our age is! Believe me, you don't want to talk to me about old, because that's like a four-letter word in my dictionary. [Congregants laugh]

But we are always at a place of choice; a place of being able to create our lives the way that we want to. That we can listen to what's going on inside of us and we can make different decisions.

I was 19 years younger than I am now when I went to ministerial school. So, I was no kid. And I had to learn. I had to learn! I'd been a nurse for 50 years, and I loved my nursing job. I couldn't believe it when I felt like I was hearing God tell me to apply for a ministerial school. I couldn't believe it because I figured I'd be doing nursing until they put *me* somewhere.

But the opportunity to serve. So, I was having dinner with my sweetheart, who has left me. He made his transition two years ago. But I was having a conversation with him. I said, "*Wes, I just feel like I'm being called to go to ministerial school.*"

And he said, "*Really?*"

And he thought I'd had this on my mind for a while. But actually, just sitting at the table with him, it just came out of me!

It was a big change. And a whole lot different than what I thought. A lot of my classmates were not youngsters, either. So, we fit in together. We did have some young ones like Kim O'Connor there with us. [Laughs] But she was far behind me in school. So anyway ...

But it was changing. It was because I listened. I listened within me and knew -- knew! -- that even though I had my whole life just charted out for the way I thought it was going to be, that everything was changing. And I was willing. I became willing to make those choices and to make those changes.

Now, It doesn't have to be a big deal like that for the changes to be going on in your life or in my life. It's just ... It's listening. You know, it could be maybe there's a place for you to volunteer you hadn't thought of before. Or -- yeah, my mind is going blank -- but I know there's things out there. You don't have to change your job or your neighborhood or move across country like I did. You don't have to do all those things. Just listen: listen to that still, small voice that is within you that will guide and direct you. Divine love and wisdom is always doing its perfect work in and through you. In and through you. It's always at work! We just have to listen and be available.

Peter -- you know that guy? [Congregants laugh] Y'all know Peter? Believe it or not, Peter -- who was a disciple -- was the first one chosen by Jesus to be a disciple. How many of you know that Jesus was kind of a character? [Congregants laugh]

Yeah, I've read the Bible through several times because I've only been in Unity 30 years. And I was in a totally different church before that.

But Peter was kind of ornery, impetuous ... but that man was courageous! He was willing to go above and beyond what other people did.

He and the other 11 disciples were in a boat. I don't remember where they were; probably on Galilee. Somewhere over there, right? Galilee. They were in this boat, and all of a sudden Jesus comes walking on the water to them. Well, they were scared, most of them. They were scared, because they thought it was a ghost or something walking on the water toward them.

But not Peter! "*Ah! Well, if you can do that, I can do that!*" So, he climbs out of the boat and he starts walking on the water.

What happened? He took his eyes off of Jesus, and he started looking at that water. Believe me, it was way over his head, right? He's looking at this water and so he started to sink. And, of course, he yelled, "*Jesus, help me !*" And, of course, Jesus helped him because that's what he did.

But you know, we could look at Peter and laugh and say, "*Ha ha ha ha ha. He didn't walk on water very long!*" But guess what? There were 11 disciples in that boat that were not walking on water, or even trying to. He was bold! He was courageous!

At the time of the crucifixion -- when they were getting ready to carry out punishments for Jesus -- old Peter took a sword and he cut off the priest's helper's ear. You can look that up and make sure I got the right order there. And Jesus just looked at him and then he put the ear back on.

But he went above and beyond, because he didn't just follow the normal path. And he didn't ask for permission. He wasn't so needing to do everything right. You know; *"I am a perfectionist!"* Not Peter! Peter did everything differently, pretty much.

And yet, Jesus looked at him ... Jesus looked at him with the eyes of the Christ; with the eyes of the Christ. He looked beyond this man who seemed to be full of flaws; who was so impetuous and outspoken; you know, doing everything differently. And Jesus looked at him and said, *"This is the man of faith. This is the rock of my church. This is the man that I have confidence in. I see him beyond what you all are looking at. This man is going to do – but, most of all, he's going to be great."* That he is great.

And Jesus went on, I mean ... Jesus, yeah he did go on. But Peter -- after the crucifixion -- you read in the Book of Acts in the Bible: he was out there! He was preaching! He was preaching to the people right away. He wasn't standing in the corner going, *"Ah, is it my turn yet? Can I really do this?"*

No, he got out there and he was talking to the people. He was talking to them about Jesus. He was talking to them about a better life that each one of them could have. Because he was willing. He was willing to go beyond the usual.

And that's what is being asked of each one of us: to go beyond the usual. It doesn't have to be something that totally turns your life upside down. But perhaps writing letters for somebody in a nursing home that isn't able to do that anymore. Visiting someone in hospice. Baking cookies for your neighbor. I don't know; I haven't baked cookies in so long that might be not something I should do, right? [Congregants laugh] But you know, things will come to you as you listen! Maybe taking someone shopping because they're not able to drive anymore.

Whatever words, whatever thoughts come to you, the voice of God is speaking to you. Because that voice speaks to each one of us in different ways. In different ways! It has a message for each one of us.

So, it's up to us to step out on that water. It's up to us to fly; you know, to take our wings and fly. To climb that mountain. To do what is ours to do. To be able to get it done. Get it done -- what others might not.

I could have dropped my notes in the floor like I did last time, but I didn't need them.

So, but I do have something I wanted to share with you [reads the poem, "If Not for You."]

*If not for you, there would be a place of emptiness in the heart of God.
If not for you, all the good you have done would still need to be done.
If not for you, the spark of your is would not have ignited a fire in others.
If not for you, the key role you have played in life's drama would remain unfulfilled.*

*If not for you, at least one person would have not awakened to their dreams.
If not for you, your triumphs could not be examples to inspire others.
If not for you, someone who needed love would not have received it.
If not for you, a life would have been shortened or never have existed.*

*If not for you, the song of life would have missed a beat.
If not for you, your gifts would remain ungiven.
If not for you, another might have suffered in your place.
If not for you, someone would have no path to follow.*

*If not for you, there would be one less smile, one less laugh, and one less hug.
If not for you, there would be one less ember of love to warm the soul.
If not for you, an animal might be homeless and a garden left unplanted.
If not for you, something would be missing.*

*You have always made a difference.
Who you are is important every day.
You are the face, the heart, and the soul of God.*

You make a difference. Step out on that water! Climb that mountain! Fly! Listen!

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