

The Kayak Kode

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If you were at church last summer, you heard me share from the pulpit that I have had a life-long fear of being in or on water where I can't see the bottom. Large boats were OK - there was an element of safety inherent in their size - but swimming or smaller craft on murky water brought on serious anxiety! My brother remembers us on a vacation as children where a hotel pool was cloudy and I had a panic attack even getting close to its edge.

I don't know where this fear originated. In general, I love being near the water and am an excellent swimmer. Perhaps a past life? Truthfully, it didn't have a big enough impact on my life to explore, or so I thought until we started to plan this summer's family vacation at Deep Creek Lake. My daughter is an avid kayaker - it's safe to say being in a kayak on the creek is her happy place. She was bringing several kayaks with her so that we could all share that joy... on a very large lake where I couldn't see the bottom.

So as I was sharing a sermon last June, in which I invited everyone to face a fear and do it anyway (you can see where this is going, right?), I took a deep breath and committed to kayaking on the lake with my daughter and granddaughters whilst on vacation. I figured if I made a very public promise from the pulpit, I would have to follow through (FYI, as a general rule, this is a powerful practice to garner support for keeping a promise!).

The big moment came the first morning after our arrival. I dragged out unpacking and breakfast for as long as I could, but eventually had to head down to the lake with everyone, kayaks and life vests in tow. Our 7 and 11-year-old granddaughters practically leaped into their kayak, while our 3-year-old granddaughter buckled up her own life vest and jumped into the lake, obviously fearless (seriously?!). After double and triple checking my own life vest, I took a deep breath - while 3 people held the kayak for me - and got in. My incredibly patient daughter handed me the oar, and got in her kayak beside me, guiding me through some quick instructions.

Then I was in a kayak, on a very big lake, where I couldn't see the bottom... and it was wonderful. With Jackie's support, I was learning the Kayak Kode (not sure if this is a real thing, or if she made it up, but it will be a sermon in the near future) and the joy of floating and rowing and literally going with the flow as the waves buffeted the kayak. I learned how to go forwards and backwards and turn the kayak, only running into the dock and rocks and other kayaks a couple of times.

I loved being on the water, and sharing in something my daughter loves. And, just as importantly, I felt such a sense of accomplishment in overcoming this fear, and keeping my promise. All my anxiety evaporated as we floated together, laughing and joking, and planning future kayaking at home.

As we were on the lake, one of my favorite songs kept running through my head (because everything reminds me of a song), "What would I do today if I were brave?" That question inevitably leads to what would I do today, tomorrow and the next day? Facing our fears isn't a one shot deal. It's an every day, asking ourselves what fear is holding back, practice. Although usually attributed to Eleanor Roosevelt, it was actually Mary Schmich, a columnist for the Chicago Tribune, who said "Do one thing every day that scares you."

So obviously that experience had an impact on me. What I want to share with you today were the lessons learned in the kayak on the lake that carry into our daily lives.

First, the obvious: **Don't let our fears hold us back.** Holding on to fear takes energy. When I let go of my fear, all that energy was released! Feel the fear and do it anyway.

Second: **Let people help you.** Maybe this isn't a big deal for you, but it's huge for me. I think I've share in the past that my mother swears my first complete sentence was, "I can do it myself!" Here's what I've learned - even if we can do it ourselves, life is a lot more fun, and a lot easier if we let others help us. There is no way I could have gotten into that kayak by myself, not the first time, and probably not the second. If I had refused help, I would have missed the whole experience. Or, maybe even worse, I would have eventually made it, but my stubbornness would have taken all the joy out of the experience.

Third: **We have to paddle in the direction we want to go.** Might seem obvious, but you'd be surprised how many of us paddle in circles, never going anywhere! Back to the old standard... doing the same thing over and over again, expecting a different result.

Fourth: **Sometimes you paddle deep, sometimes you paddle shallow, and sometimes you just go with the flow.** This was a big one for me. If we approach everything in our lives with the same level of intensity, or the lack thereof, we're going to either burn out, or veg out. We need to practice discernment about when it's time to dig deep, when it's time to chill out, and when it's time to go with the flow and see where the river takes us.

Fifth: **Always wear a life vest.** For me, this translates into expect the best, and prepare for the worst. Or to quote an ancient Arabic proverb: Trust Allah, and tie your camel. We sometimes metafizzle this in New Thought communities. "If I wear a life vest or a seat belt, etc. it means I'm 'creating' the need to use them." No, it means we recognize that we live in a very unpredictable universe, that expects us to use our innate wisdom!

Sixth: **Choose an appropriate paddling location for your skill level.** Don't make life harder than it needs to be! Jackie very wisely created a safe first experience for me. That experience would have been much different if she had led me into raging rapids! Small sweet steps.... (On the other hand, once you have that skill level, go for it! Back to "don't let fear hold you back.")

Seventh: **It's more fun with friends.** No explanation needed. :-)

Next: **Dress for conditions.** If it's cold, dress for cold. If it's sunny, wear sunscreen and bring plenty of drinking water. Or, when in Rome... I remember one time several years ago when I was consulting with a church in Hawaii. I dressed as I usually do for a Sunday morning service - suit, pearls, panty hose and heels. When I got to church, I realized I was very overdressed! Everyone else was in shorts and sandals. I got it. The next Sunday I was in a sundress and sandals. Be prepared, and flexible... and pay attention.

Finally: **Pay Attention.** You'd think this goes without saying, but I've found that I need regular reminders. When kayaking, you need to be constantly scanning the conditions around you. Where is the current going? Where are there rocks, logs, or boulders in your path? Where is there a speed boat that will create a large wake? Where are your kayaking buddies? How far are you from shore? We need to pay attention.

This translates into practicing mindfulness, and paying attention to our thoughts and our actions (and/or our reactions). It's not that there won't be boulders and logs and wakes on our journey. It's about not letting those obstacles capsize our kayak! And when they occasionally do, then we practice getting back in... grateful for our life vests and the help of friends.

So I sent this to Jackie to double check before sharing with you this morning. This is what she sent back to me:

It's good! The paying attention one is probably one of the most important. I shared with you about my friend not paying attention so many times I just let him run into a little rock instead of telling him (lol). When he asked why I didn't tell him, I simply responded 'teach a man to fish...' He got the message.

One addition to the paddling one that I probably didn't share with you because we were on a lake... The first time I went white water rafting I learned the best paddling/life lesson. When going through rapids or precarious spots... don't stop paddling. If you stop paddling/freakout or give up you lose control of the kayak/life. The other important lesson if you do fall out of your kayak, always hold on to your paddle not kayak (if you have to choose between the two). The life vest will keep you afloat. If you lose your paddle, your kayak is useless anyway with no way to steer it.

In summary... the Kayak Kode teaches us to be willing to face our fears, to be flexible, to allow support into our lives to pay attention... and no matter what, to keep paddling!