

## Recap

Previously on Story Church: Jeremy Martin, an irreligious Chicago lawyer returned home to Mt. Pleasant for his niece's baptism. At church, he ran into Lauren Sanchez, a friend from high school, who surprised him when she stood up after the baptism and walked to the front of the sanctuary.

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**Mark 1:14-20** Jesus announces the Kingdom of God is at hand; it's time to change hearts and lives. Then Jesus calls fishermen to be his disciples and tells them to fish for other people.

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## Scene 1

After Jeremy's niece was baptized, the pastor asked if anyone else wanted to profess faith in Jesus and get busy living. Lauren, who was sitting next to Jeremy, stood right up. She scooted sideways out of the pew and into the aisle. She turned halfway to look back at Jeremy with wide eyes and then turned fully to the front and walked forward.

The pastor saw her and smiled. He motioned, encouraging her to come forward.

When she got to the front, the pastor said, "Do you wish to confess your faith in Jesus?"

Lauren said, "I do."

He said, "Have you been baptized?" She said she was when she was a baby, but her family didn't continue with church after that. In fact, Lauren had just started going to worship on her own six months ago. She was looking for something more in life.

He said, "Do you repent of your sin?" She said yes.

"Do you confess Jesus as Lord and Savior?" She said yes.

"Do you promise to participate and serve in the church?" She said yes.

He invited her to kneel down by the baptismal font. Then he scooped up water and let it splash back into the bowl. He said, "Lauren, you've already been baptized, but remember your baptism and be thankful." And the congregation said, "Amen."

The pastor said, "Lauren, your parents chose to have you baptized when you were a baby. But now, you are choosing this life for yourself. Whatever you've gone through, remember, the old you is dead, buried, and out of the way. You're born again. You're a new creation. This is a new life."

And then he helped her stand up and said, "Lauren, things might happen quickly now that you're choosing to get busy living." She walked back down the aisle and the pastor said, "Hallelujah! Let's sing." As the organ pushed the air around the sanctuary, Lauren sat down next to Jeremy, who was very

uncomfortable. He didn't know what to say. They kind of looked at each other sideways. He mumbled, "Uh, congratulations." He said it almost like a question. She smiled.

After the service, Lauren told Jeremy she wanted to go and tell her mom and dad what happened. She asked if he was going back to Chicago right away. He said he was taking a whole week off. They exchanged numbers and she promised to call him. Then Jeremy watched as she tried to leave quickly. People in the church kept greeting her and hugging her. Finally she got out the door.

Jeremy went with his family to his brother's home where four generations shared a meal to celebrate his niece's baptism.

## Scene 2

On Monday morning, Lauren called Jeremy. "Hey, what are you doing? You want to go fishing?" Jeremy laughed. "I don't know when's the last time I went fishing. I don't know if I've ever gone fishing in my life. I don't think we even have a fishing pole here at my parent's house."

She said, "Don't worry, my dad has a bunch of equipment. My parents don't know what to make of this church stuff yesterday. I think they're worried I'm going cuckoo, but fishing is sane in my family so they'll let me borrow it. We can go out to the Skunk River at Oakland Mills State Park and go fishing at the dam. I'll bring us some food to eat for a picnic."

Jeremy didn't have anything else to do. Then he stopped and said, "Wait, don't you have to work?"

She said, "No, I just quit my job."

"What?!"

She said, "I'll tell you about it when we go fishing. I'll pick you up in a half hour." Thirty minutes later, she picked up Jeremy and drove south the eight minutes to the state park.

The Skunk River is a tributary of the mighty Mississippi River. Its headwaters are in north central Iowa before flowing southeast to the Mississippi. An Iowa State University professor started the Skunk River Navy in 1998 for students to learn about the biology of the river ecosystem and serve the community by cleaning garbage out of the river. Sadly, there's a lot of garbage.

Paddlers in kayaks and canoes use the river recreationally, though they have to avoid the low head dam at Oakland Mills, staying well above or far below the dam. The water cresting over the dam looks deceptively gentle, but dangerous currents below a low head dam are capable of trapping and holding you underwater for extended periods of time.

It had been a hundred years since a drowning there. There was a close call just ten years before when two people from Mt. Pleasant tried to go over the dam in a small boat. The water pushed the boat down and sank it. Luckily, the two geniuses were able to escape and swim ashore a mile downriver.<sup>1</sup>

The dam was a great fishing pier, though. People stood on the concrete abutments on each side of the river and tossed their lines in for bass, walleye, catfish, and carp.

Jeremy didn't know what he was doing but Lauren helped him cast off. After they got their lines in the water and quieted down, Jeremy said, "So what happened with your job?"

She said, "Well, I quit my job after I broke up with my boyfriend."

"Why, what's going on?"

She said, "After I started following Jesus yesterday, I knew I had to make some changes. First thing I did was I talk to my boyfriend last night. It wasn't a healthy relationship. I always knew it wasn't, I just didn't see any other future."

Jeremy said, "But why'd you quit your job, how are you going to live?"

Lauren said, "Well, you know I told you I was working at the auto parts store and I kind of liked it. I was working with my boyfriend; his dad owns the store. So when I broke up with him I knew I needed to make a clean getaway."

Jeremy said, "You did all this because you went forward at church yesterday? Aren't you concerned you might just be making hasty, uninformed decisions?"

Lauren smiled. "Always the lawyer, aren't you? No! I feel alive, like I just woke up from a 30 year coma and my whole real life is ahead of me."

Jeremy said, "You got all that from church yesterday?"

She said, "Remember the pastor told the story from *The Shawshank Redemption* about choosing to get busy living or get busy dying? But do you remember the movie, when Andy Dufresne breaks out of prison? There's a big storm and when the thunder is crashing, Andy is pounding his way through the wall and into the sewer pipe. He crawls through all that muck; he's retching. Finally, he makes it to the end of the outfall and falls into river. The water washes over him, and then Andy Dufresne stands up with his arms outstretched to the sky. It's raining on him. Thunder and lightening is crashing around him. He stumbles through the water and tears his prison clothing off. He's free. New life.<sup>2</sup>

"I just kept seeing that, like on the movie screen in my mind. And when the pastor asked if anyone wanted to choose life, I knew I did and I just stood up."

### Scene 3

An hour later, Lauren drove Jeremy back to his parents' home. They hadn't caught a single fish, not one bite. But they enjoyed a nice picnic lunch that Lauren packed.

In the car Jeremy thanked her for taking him fishing. He said he was sorry they didn't actually catch any fish but the food was good and he liked hanging out with her.

With a twinkle in her eye, Lauren said, "No worries, it wasn't even the right time to go, but I wasn't trying to catch fish."

"What? Then why'd we go fishing?"

Lauren said, "I'm trying to catch something else."

Jeremy hesitated and awkwardly said, "Look, Lauren, you probably know I always liked you in high school, but I'm not looking for a relationship now with someone four hours away from where I live."

Lauren laughed, hard. She said, "You're a cotton headed ninny muggins. I'm not hitting on you. I liked you in *high school* too. I'm not trying to catch another boyfriend. I'm trying to reel you in, but it's because I want you to have what I'm experiencing, what started at church yesterday."

Jeremy's face flushed with color. "O sorry. I guess I don't have much time for church."

She said, "O, you don't have time for God, the Creator of the Universe, who gave you life and wants you to really live it?"

He said, "I don't really know what I believe. But I'm happy for you. You do seem like you're kind of glowing."

She said, "O don't worry, we'll go fishing again. I'm not letting you off the hook that easy. You're here for the week. But we have something else to do tomorrow. You remember Lizzy, Elizabeth Harrison?"

Lizzy had graduated from high school with Jeremy and Lauren.

Lauren said, "I don't know if you know this, but not long after graduation, Lizzy started getting messed up with drugs, I think she was doing meth. She's been struggling with drugs for the last twelve years. She started college over at Iowa Wesleyan but she couldn't make it and dropped out. She couldn't keep any job for long. She's been in and out of a bunch of relationships. It's been rough. We haven't been close since high school but I see her around town and we talk. She's in the paper sometimes in the police log. I saw her on Saturday and she told me her birthday is tomorrow. She's having a party downtown at Rumors and invited me to stop by: pizza, pool, drinks, karaoke. I thanked her for the invite but I didn't take it seriously. At least, I didn't really want to go then. But now I do; I'm fishing. If anyone needs Jesus, it's Lizzy."

Lauren wanted Jeremy to go. He laughed and said, "I'm probably more comfortable there than I am at church."

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.iowawhitewater.org/lhd/LHDoaklandmills.html>

<sup>2</sup> Journalist Dean Nelson says in his book, *God Hides in Plain Sight*, that this is the best example of baptism he has seen (quoted in *Pulpit Resource*, January 8, 2012)