

Gospel 5 C

[Lk 5:1-11](#)

While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret. He saw two boats there alongside the lake; the fishermen had disembarked and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch." Simon said in reply, "Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets." When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come to help them. They came and filled both boats so that the boats were in danger of sinking. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him and all those with him, and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon. Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.

Jerome Biblical Commentary

(a) THE CALL OF SIMON PETER (5:1-11). See Mk 1:16-20; 4:1f.; Mt 4:18-22; cf. Jn 1:35-42; 21:1-11. Luke's account is either a composition that he prepared from various sources (the more probable opinion, for the section is exceptionally heavy with Lucan turns of style) or else the result of oral transmission with details of different stories intermingled. The description of the place (5:1-3) corresponds to Mk 4:1f., but Mk then proceeds with the parable of the sower. The story of the miracle (5:4-10a) contains many points of similarity (and difference!-see A. Plummer, *Luke*, 147) with the postresurrection event in Jn 21:1-11. The call of Simon (5:10b-11) reminds us of Mk 1:17, 20. It seems very unlikely that Peter would have forgotten or Mark overlooked the

miraculous draught of fishes if such a wonder had occurred at the momentous time of Peter's vocation. Luke probably combines several events, in order to highlight symbolically the fuller meaning of Peter's vocation. Just as the Nazareth incident prefigured the rejection of Jesus by his own and the Capernaum account his enthusiastic reception by outsiders, the vocation of Peter is told in such a way as to symbolize the great number of Gentile converts in the Messianic community.

1. *the lake of Gennesareth:* The other Evangelists speak of the Sea of Galilee, but Luke more properly calls it a lake (for it is a small, pear-shaped body of water, 13 mi. long and 7.5 mi. wide, with fresh, cool water, abounding with fish). *Gennesaret:* The name is derived from that of the plain just NW of the lake. H. Conzelmann recognizes a special theological meaning in the "lake." Just as the "mountain" is the favorite setting for communications with the Father in Lk, so the lake provides a place for manifestations of power.**5. *Master:*** Epistata is a favorite title for Jesus in Lk, replacing the Hebr rabbi. Though the men had worked exhaustively through the night, Peter will let down the net "on the strength of your word, (proper meaning of the prep. epi; cf. 2:20).**8. *Lord:*** The change from "Master" to "Lord" (Gk Kyrie) reflects Peter's religious fear before the awesome presence of the divine (→ Aspects NT Thought, 78:25).**10.** Distinct from Mk 1:17f., where Jesus addresses Andrew as well as Simon and a little later James and John, this section of Lk portrays Jesus, speaking exclusively to Peter: "from this moment forward you [sing.] will be catching men." *this moment:* The phrase is heavily underlined in Greek; it implies a crisis in Peter's life (cf. same phrase in 1:48b). Peter will be catching men in order to save their lives, rather than fish to be consumed at a family dinner; the fut. tense of the verb plus the participle assign Peter to a lifelong vocation. Writing after AD 70, Luke infers that Peter's leadership will never be vacated in favor of anyone else, including James, as some scholars maintain because of Acts 10 (cf. O. Cullmann, *Peter* [N.Y., 1958]).**11. *brought the boats to land:*** The vb. kat-agō forms an elegant conclusion to the introductory word in v. 30, ep-an-agō, "to put out from the shore" (M. J. Lagrange, *Luc*, 160). *they left everything:* Luke's addition to the other Gospels, for he writes the "Gospel of Absolute Renouncement" (→ 10 above). Luke makes the call to an apostolic vocation all the more heroic and single-minded on this occasion of an abundant draught of fishes. (See L. Grollenberg, *TT* 5 [1965] 330-36. G. de Raucourt, *RSR* 29 [1939])

Hebr Hebrew

Gk Greek

NT New Testament

TT *Tijdschrift voor Theologie*

RSR *Recherches de science religieuse*

Douay-Rheims Text and Haydock's Catholic Commentary

The miraculous draught of fishes. The cure of the leper and of the paralytic. The call of Matthew.

1 And it came to pass, that when the multitudes pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Genesareth, 2 And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. 3 And going into one of the ships that was Simon's, he desired him to draw back a little from the land. And sitting he taught the multitudes out of the ship. 4 Now when he had ceased to speak, he said to Simon: Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. 5 And Simon answering said to him: Master, we have labored all the night, and have taken nothing: but at thy word I will let down the net.

6 And when they had done this, they enclosed a very great multitude of fishes, and their net broke. 7 And they beckoned to their partners that were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they were almost sinking. 8 Which when Simon Peter saw, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying: Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. 9 For he was wholly astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken. 10 And so were also James and John the sons of Zebedee, who were Simon's partners. And Jesus saith to Simon: Fear not: from henceforth thou shalt catch men.

11 And having brought their ships to land, leaving all things, they followed him.

Notes & Commentary:

Ver. 1. What St. Luke here gives till ver. 10, is mentioned purposely to shew on what occasion, and by what miracle, Peter, Andrew, James, and John, were called. (Maldonatus)

Ver. 2. *Washing their nets.* See St. Matthew iv. 18. and St. Mark i. 16, where it is said, that Christ saw them when they were *casting their nets*; i.e. some of them were *casting*, others *washing*, or *mending*, their nets. (Witham)

Ver. 3. Why is it mentioned that there were two ships; that one of them was Simon Peter's, that Christ went into that one, and sat down in it, and sitting he taught out of that ship? No doubt, answer many of the ancient commentators, to shew that the Church

¹Brown, R. E., Fitzmyer, J. A., & Murphy, R. E. 1968]; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996. *The Jerome Biblical commentary* (electronic ed.). Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, NJ

was figured by the bark of Peter, and that in it is the chair of Christ, a permanent authority, prefigured by Christ's sitting down, and the true word of God.

Ver. 4. *Epanagage eis to bathos*. Put back from whence you have just now returned. Where you failed without Christ, with Christ you will prove successful. Now is the proper time, when you act in my presence, and according to my orders; before it was not, when you followed your own, and not my will. (Maldonatus) --- St. Augustine interprets the text, *Launch out into the deep*, as spoken of distant nations, to whom the gospel was afterwards delivered: *tolle signum in gentes, ad eas, quæ propè, et ad eas quæ longè*. (Isaias v. 26. and xi. 12.)

Ver. 5. Though these words of St. Peter seem to express his little hope of success, as he had been toiling (*kopiasantes*) the whole night, the most favourable time for fishing, yet they were intended by St. Peter to shew his great confidence, that notwithstanding his bad success, he was willing to obey; he relied on his words, and let go his net in the same place where before he had been disappointed; and the event proved that the obedience and confidence of Peter were not in vain. (Maldonatus, &c.)

Ver. 6. When Christ commanded Peter to let go the net, as great a quantity of fishes were taken as this Lord of the land and sea wished. For the voice of the Lord is the voice of power, at the command of which, in the beginning of the world, light and every created thing sprang into existence. This it was that so much astonished Peter. (St. Gregory of Nazianzus, chap. xxxi.) --- The net is broken, but the fishes are not lost, because the Lord preserves his servants among the scandals (schisms and heresies) of his enemies. (Ven. Bede)

Ver. 7. The other ship was probably at such a distance from them, that they could not be heard, had they called out to them; and this also is another proof of the greatness of the miracle, that though the other ship was fishing in the same place, though a little removed, they could catch nothing. (Maldonatus) --- This also shews that Peter was to call in other co-labourers, and that all were to come into Peter's ship. (St. Ambrose, in Luc.)

Ver. 8. Such was the excess of St. Peter's humility, that he judged himself unworthy the presence of Christ, and by this rendered himself more worthy. So the centurion, for a similar act of self-abasement, merited to hear from Truth itself, that he was preferred to all Israel. Euthymius is however of opinion, that St. Peter desired Christ to leave him through fear, lest some evil should befall him, because he was not worthy of his presence. In the same manner as the widow of Sarepta thought her son had died, because she was not worthy of the presence of Elias. (3 Kings xvii. 18.) (Maldonatus)

Ver. 10. Jesus Christ answers the thought of St. Peter, that instead of any loss or evil coming to him, he should, on the contrary, receive a great reward, by being appointed a fisher of men; and, as he had taken so many fishes by the divine assistance, so he should take in his net innumerable souls, not so much by his own industry, as by the divine grace and assistance. (Maldonatus)

Ver. 11. We may suppose that these four apostles, like Andrew, followed Jesus Christ at the first call, but without attaching themselves to him; and that now they attached themselves to him, never to leave him more.

Word Biblical Commentary (non-Catholic)

1 ἐγένετο (“it happened”) + καί + finite verb is a frequent Lukanism (5:12, 17; 8:1, 22; 9:28, 51; 14:1; 17:11; 19:15; 24:4, 15; also Acts 5:7; 9:19; for Luke’s other ἐγένετο expressions see at 1:8 and 6:6). It usually marks a new beginning. Jesus’ capacity to attract crowds is already known from 4:42 and therefore requires no explanation. ἐπικεῖσθαι αὐτῷ, “to press upon him,” justifies the use of the boat (cf. Mark 3:9). The crowd is not exemplary: to hear the word of God is not enough (6:47; 8:21; 11:28). Luke continues to underline the public impact of Jesus. “The word of God” is a comprehensive designation of the Christian message applied both to Jesus’ preaching and to Christian evangelism in Acts. It is God’s message which is spoken by Jesus (as in Christian evangelism). The periphrastic form ἦν ἐστώς, “was standing,” subordinates this verb to the following εἶδεν (“saw”; cf. 4:31). Jesus stands to teach also at 6:17 (and cf. 24:36). Luke, like Josephus (*Ant.* 18.28), prefers λίμνη, “lake,” to the θάλασσα, “sea,” of the other evangelists, and Γεννησαρέτ, “Gennesaret,” as the name, after the district mentioned in Mark 6:53 (similarly Josephus, *War* 3.506; 1 Macc 11:67).

2 εἶδεν, “he saw,” is perhaps from Mark 1:16, as is ἀλιεῖς, “fishermen.” δύο, “two,” prepares for v 7. The repetition of “standing by the sea” is an instance of a characteristic failure in Luke’s style (Cadbury, “Lucan Style,” 97–100; Brun, SO 11 [1932] 39). ἔπλυνον, “were washing,” i.e., after a night of fishing (Bundy, *Jesus*, 92). This activity may imply an early morning setting (cf. v 5) but such plays no role for Luke.

3 ἐμβὰς δὲ εἰς ἓν τῶν πλοίων, “getting into one of the boats,” is from Mark’s εἰς πλοῖον ἐμβάντα, (4:1—“getting into a boat”). The reader knows of Simon from 4:38. For the request to Simon compare Mark 3:9 and 4:1. Sitting and teaching the crowd is like Mark 4:1–2. ἐπαναγαγεῖν anticipates v 4. Jesus’ teaching from the boat binds together the activities of Jesus and Peter: Jesus is fishing from the boat to catch men (Brun, SO 11 [1932] 37). It is to make this point that Luke has thus preferred the fishing miracle and call.

cf. *confer*, compare

Ant. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*

War *The Jewish War*

SO Symbolae osloenses

4 ὡς δὲ ἐπαύσατο λαλῶν, “as he ceased speaking,” marks the major transition in the narrative: in vv 1–3 the link with Peter is incidental; from this point it is central. The relationship between ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς ἐπαναγαγεῖν ὀλίγον “to put out *a little* from the land”—v 3) and ἐπανάγαγε εἰς τὸ βάθος, “put out *into the deep*”—v 4) has encouraged an allegorical reading in terms of Jewish and gentile missions (Holtzmann, *Synoptiker*, 334–35; Loisy, 169–76; Hilgert, *The Ship*, 105; Reicke, *Luke*, 68–69). But then Simon should be depicted as fishing in close as well (9:1–6; Acts 2, etc). The deep is simply where the (literal) fish are to be fished for; Jesus had not himself been after (literal) fish. The contrast is fish and men, not Gentiles and Jews. Any thought that the fish are to be rescued from the “chaotic waters of darkness” (Mánek, *NovT* 2 [1957] 138–41; Derrett, *NovT* 22 [1980] 121 n. 44) is also to be rejected. While ἐπανάγαγε, “put out,” is singular, χαλάσατε, “let down,” is plural: Simon is envisaged as having a crew under his command (cf. Mark 1:20).

5 ἐπιστάτα, “master,” may be from Luke (cf. 8:24, 45; 9:33, 49; 17:13). He often prefers it to the other synoptists’ διδάσκαλε, “teacher,” or ραββί, “Rabbi,” in the cases where Jesus’ authority in contexts not directly related to teaching is in view. Since for Luke διδάσκαλε is an objective description while ἐπιστάτα involves a personal recognition of Jesus’ authority, the latter is mostly on the lips of disciples (except 17:13). ἐπὶ τῷ ῥήματί σου, “at your word,” points to the intrinsic authority of Jesus’ words. Certainly no disrespect is implied (contra Dietrich, *Petrusbild*, 43; Derrett, *NovT* 22 [1980] 122; Matthews, *ExpTim* 30 [1918–19] 425; Delorme, *NTS* 18 [1971–72] 336).

6 The greatness of the miracle is multiply attested: πλῆθος ... πολὺ (“a great multitude”); διερρήσσετο τὰ δίκτυα (“the nets were about to break”—cf. BDF 323.4); βυθίζεσθαι (“to be on the point of sinking” [v 7]—cf. BDF 338.1).

7 κατένευσαν is literally “they signaled by nodding their heads,” but perhaps may be used more broadly for signaling in general (Fitzmyer, 567). Either they signaled with their heads because their hands were occupied (Grundmann, 128), or they signaled because their voices would not carry the distance (Easton, 61; Lagrange, 158; Plummer, 144). The μέτοχοι were the business partners in the other boat (Wuellner, *Meaning*, 23–24). Fishing boats normally worked in pairs (Grundmann, 128). No doubt the technical problems of drawing fish into the second boat were surmountable. Pesch (*Fischfang*, 115) cites fishing stories where the marvelous catch turned out to be a dead

NovT Novum Testamentum

n. note

ExpTim *The Expository Times*

NTS *New Testament Studies*

BDF F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament* (University of Chicago/University of Cambridge, 1961)

camel, a rock, or an urn. The miracle is only fully known when the fish have been drawn from the water.

8 Only here in Luke is the double name used (but cf. 6:14), probably from the source. προσπίπτειν τοῖς γόνασίν τινος, “to fall at the knees of someone,” is a somewhat unusual expression, but see other examples at BAGD, 718. Simon’s response is appropriate to a theophany (cf. Isa 6:1–8, esp. vv 5 and 8, and Ezek 1:1–2:3, esp. 1:28 and 2:3, and cf. 1 Sam 5). This is better than finding here postresurrection remorse for the denial of Jesus (Hirsch, *Auferstehungsgeschichten*, 22–23; Fitzmyer, 561–62, and others). Κύριε is here probably not Luke’s usual “Sir,” but the “supreme Lord” of 1:43 and 2:11—and of Luke’s own narrational designation of Jesus as Lord. However, Luke offers no clear picture of the development of Christological awareness. His concern here is more to set forth an experience of the numinous as present in Jesus and his deeds (cf. 8:22–25; Dietrich, *Petrusbild*, 46–47).

9 The others present shared something of Simon’s experience, if not his precise response. Luke may be responsible for the use of θάμβος (“astonishment”; cf. v 36).

10 Having replaced Mark 1:16–18 with the present account, Luke (overloading his sentence) adds here a mention of James and John, sons of Zebedee, so as not to lose the main content of Mark 1:19–20. Luke sacrifices a mention of Andrew, who is less important to him (he appears in the apostolic lists only: 6:14 and Acts 1:13) and who could not be introduced into the account without sacrificing the central focus on Simon. James and John are identified as the partners of v 7. Here the less technical κοινωνοί, “those who share,” is used. The trio appear again in 8:51 and 9:28, and James and John as a pair in 9:54 (cf. Acts 12:2). Peter and John are linked in 22:8 and Acts 3:1, 3, 4, 11; 4:13, 19; 8:14.

Attention returns immediately to Simon. Jesus’ response begins with the μὴ φοβοῦ, “do not be afraid,” familiar in epiphany scenes (cf. 1:13 and 30; 2:10; cf. Dietrich, *Petrusbild*, 46–47; Pesch, *Fischfang*, 139). The threat of the sea (βυθιζεσθαι, “to be at the point of sinking”) is not the issue here (contra Derrett, *NovT* 22 [1980] 122, and cf. Mánek, *NovT* 2 [1957] 138–41). The miraculous catch is an encounter with the divine that makes possible Peter’s call, but it is also an acting out in prophetic symbolism of his later apostolic role (cf. Hos 1–3; Ezek 4, 5, 12, etc). The ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν, “from now on,” is Lukan (1:48; 12:52; 22:18, 69; Acts 18:6). Luke does not use the expression strictly chronologically. Rather, it denotes a fundamental change in the state of affairs (Pesch, *Fischfang*, 140). Luke sees the new role as primarily becoming effective in the postresurrection situation (see at 1:2) but there is a prolepsis in 9:1–6 and the formation of the apostolic college in 6:13–16. However, already in v 11 the situation of Simon is

BAGD W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ET, ed. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich; 2d ed. rev. F. W. Gingrich and F. W. Danker (University of Chicago, 1979)

fundamentally changed. ζωγρῶν is strictly “catching alive” and is so used in the LXX (Grollenberg, *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* 5 [1965] 330–36). There is evidence of its secular use to apply a fishing metaphor to the catching of people (BAGD, 340). ἀλιευτής (cf. the ἀλιεῖς, “fishermen,” of Mark 1:17) and ἀλιεύειν, “to fish,” are both used to the same effect (Wuellner, *Meaning*, 71–72). OT judgment imagery (Jer 16:16; Amos 4:2; Hab 1:14–15, etc) plays no part here (contra C. W. F. Smith, *HTR* 52 [1959] 187–203). Here men are gathered for salvation. The overtones of the image need not be negative (Diogenes Laertius 2).

2

LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

OT Old Testament

HTR *Harvard Theological Review*

²Nolland, J. 2002. *Vol. 35A: Word Biblical Commentary : Luke 1:1-9:20*. Word Biblical Commentary . Word, Incorporated: Dallas