

## Discipleship in the Lectionary – 02/09/2025



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

**Fifth Sunday After the Epiphany**

Revised Common Lectionary Year C

Sunday, February 9<sup>th</sup>

**Luke 5:1-11**

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### ***Call to discipleship***

The Gospel lection for this week describes how Jesus called His first disciples when He was preaching by the Lake of Gennesaret (also known as the Sea of Galilee). This distinctive call narrative involves Jesus' inner circle of Peter, James, and John. What does this text reveal about our own call to discipleship?

#### Luke 5:1-11 Commentary

There is more context to this call narrative than Matthew and Mark's versions that fall even earlier within Jesus' ministry. In Luke we first read how Jesus returned from His time in the wilderness to Galilee "*in the power of the spirit*" and how reports about him were already circulating in all the surrounding country (4:14). Then there was the rejection in Nazareth (4.16-30), an exorcism in Capernaum (4.31-37), the healing of Simon's mother-in-law (4.38-39), many healings and exorcisms in Capernaum (4.40-41), then Jesus continuing to preach (4.42-44) with such a growing popularity that the opening verse of the lectionary text describes how the crowd was pressing in on Him (5:1). This lectionary text is the first passage in a larger section dealing with discipleship (5:1-6:13).

*<sup>1</sup> On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, <sup>2</sup> and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup> Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat.*

Jesus is now out of the synagogues on the shore of the lake of Gennesaret (Sea of Galilee) and is confronted with a crowd eager to hear Jesus preach. Jesus adapts his preaching format by addressing the crowd on the shore of the lake from a boat. We read again how Jesus "*sat down*" and taught. Sitting down is the customary teaching position. Jesus chose Simon's boat. We know this is not the first time Jesus met Simon in Luke's narrative. Earlier Jesus had entered Simon's house in Capernaum where He healed Simon's mother-in-law and many others (4:38-41). Therefore, by this time Simon had already witnessed Jesus perform miracles.

*<sup>4</sup> And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." <sup>5</sup> And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." <sup>6</sup> And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. <sup>7</sup> They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.*

With the sermon over, Jesus turns to Simon and tells him to take his boat further into the deep and let down his nets for a catch. Simon addresses Jesus as "Master". The Greek word used *epistata* is only found in Luke and each time it is used it refers to Jesus. "Master" may be an over-simplistic term since *epistata* could have several meanings such as teacher, guardian, visitor. Some commentators consider Simon's comments here as a mild rebuke. Simon informs Jesus that they had fished all night (the best time to fish) and caught nothing. When Jesus showed up, they were cleaning their nets after a fruitless night of fishing. Simon's next comments are key: "*But at your word I will let down the nets.*" Simon takes Jesus at his word. It must have been a powerful sermon! The fisherman is rewarded with a miraculous catch.

*<sup>8</sup> But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." <sup>9</sup> For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, <sup>10</sup> and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." <sup>11</sup> And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.*

Interestingly, Luke now refers to Simon as Simon Peter. We read of the official name change later in 6:14. Simon's response is like Isaiah's response when the prophet was called by God (Isaiah 6:5). Simon falls to his knees and acknowledges his sin. He knew he was in the presence of God. The words, "*Do not be afraid*" allude to the divine messages delivered by Gabriel to Zechariah in the temple (1:13) and to Mary (1:30). There were others in the boats, but James and John are mentioned specifically. Jesus then gives them their commission - from now on they will be fishing for people. The word rendered as "catching" means to capture alive. Where the fishermen have been catching live fish to turn them into food, they will be catching people who are dead in their sin so that they can have life. They left everything and followed Jesus. Their response was total commitment.

### Reflection and Action

As we reflect on Peter's call to discipleship, John's Gospel has a different account (John 1:35-42). First, Andrew (Simon Peter's brother) was one of the two disciples of John the Baptist who heard John call Jesus the "*Lamb of God*" and they decided to go and see Jesus. We read it was Andrew who was the disciple who, after hearing Jesus speak, decided to follow Jesus. It was then Andrew who sought out his brother and told him "*We have found the Messiah*" and then brought him (Simon Peter) to Jesus. In Luke's account, Simon Peter had already met Jesus in Capernaum. Jesus entered Simon Peter's house and healed his mother-in-law (4:38-39). Many suggest John's account is of how Peter and Jesus first met. Luke's narrative is what occurs after this first meeting. There is also a post-resurrection appearance in John's Gospel which resembles Luke's story in this week's lection (John 21:1-23). Perhaps this is Peter's final call to discipleship.

Based on the above, Simon Peter's call is more complex than a single "follow me" event where Jesus shows up for the first time. Peter's call to discipleship (and ours too) is a process that happens over time. It involves a deepening relationship with Jesus. It requires trust on our part. It requires we trust Jesus at His Word. Although Simon Peter knew it would be futile, he obeyed Jesus when He instructed him to put down his nets. He submitted to God's will like Mary (1:34,38). Even though Simon Peter did not fully understand, he knew he was in the presence of God and acted accordingly.