

Sitting in the Gap Study Guide – February 10, 2019

[Luke 5:1-11](#)

(Click on scripture above to link directly to each passage in the *NRSV* on biblegateway.com.)

Suggested Study / Prep

1. Read the passage(s) in several different translations and/or paraphrases (e.g. *NRSV* and *The Message*)
2. Read the provided commentary(s) below
3. Visit and explore some of the additional resources links (and/or explore your own commentaries, resources, etc)
4. Reflect on the provided questions
5. Generate your own questions and “wonderings”

Commentary on Luke 5:1-11 (From *Homiletics*; “Side Hustle”, February 10, 2019)

Consider first the overall setting of this pericope. In chapters 4 and 5, Luke summarizes Jesus’ lifelong ministry: teaching, healing, forming a community of disciples and arguing with the contemporary leaders. Luke also introduces some of the key players who will be important throughout Luke-Acts. Earlier in chapter 4, Jesus has taught in the synagogue at Nazareth and Judea, expelled demons, cured the sick — notably Simon’s mother-in-law — and prayed in the desert by himself. At the opening of chapter 5, pressed around by a crowd, Jesus undertakes to broaden the notion of his ministry from that of a “lone ranger” model to discipleship of a community of sinners. (See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J. *The Gospel According to Luke: Introduction, Translation and Notes*, Anchor Bible vol. 28 [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981], 559.) Later in chapter 5, Jesus again calls a disciple, contends with leaders of the people, teaches and heals.

This pericope, then, stands in the middle of the sequence. Scholars generally agree that Luke found inspiration for it from two sources: Mark’s account of the call of Simon Peter, his brother and the sons of Zebedee (Mark 1:16-20); and a tradition of a miraculous catch of fish by Simon Peter and other disciples (François Bovon, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1-9:50*. Trans. Christine M. Thomas. Hermeneia. [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002], 170-72). Luke’s genius was to remove both stories from their “original” literary setting and bring them together. The careful contemporary reader will recall that Mark sets the call of Peter *before* the healing of his mother-in-law, while Luke places the call after this healing. The miraculous catch story, which so resembles the fishing story in John 21, probably was originally a post-resurrection account (Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 560-562).

With these changes, the story flows. The crowd is looking for the “word of God,” the gospel’s phrase for the proclamation of Jesus. Jesus teaches from the boat (v. 3) and then accomplishes the miraculous catch of fish (vv. 4-9). In the midst of this narrative, Simon Peter (note the name change) falls to his knees to confess that he is a “sinful man” (v. 8). The flow of the story is to highlight the proclamation-prophecy by Jesus in verse 10: “... from now on you [singular] will be catching people,” which Luke appears to have edited from Mark 1:17. Two points may be drawn here. First of all, contrary to Mark, the prophecy only applies to Simon Peter. The second point has to do with the translation of the prophecy. As usually rendered, the prophecy sounds little different from that in Mark: “I will

make you fish for people.” But Luke adds an ambiguous verb, translated in the NRSV as “catching.” In fact, it can as easily be translated “capture alive” or “restore to life.” The latter translation then prefigures Simon Peter’s own miraculous life restorations recorded in Acts 3 and 9, and the more universal action of the church bringing life to the world. All together, in these verses, Luke introduces Simon Peter as the sinner-disciple. Luke will focus on his growth in faith throughout the gospel and the first half of Acts.

Often unremarked is the statement in verse 11 by which Luke alone tells us that the first disciples “left everything” to follow him. Luke is deeply concerned about possessions and their proper use. Here, and in the call of Levi (5:27-28), Luke describes a radical response to Jesus’ call: the rejection of all material goods in order to follow him. It should be noted that Simon, in particular, has received in abundance from Jesus, through the restoration to health of his mother-in-law and the miraculous catch of fish. For Luke, God’s generosity precedes God’s call to discipleship and renunciation. The only time Luke recounts Jesus demanding such a response from someone who is not one of the inner core of disciples is in Jesus’ encounter with the ruler in 18:18-27, when Jesus advises that “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (v. 25). Elsewhere in Luke-Acts, however, the admonition is to share one’s possessions as exemplified in 3:11 (John the Baptist advises, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none”), 16:19-31 (the rich man is condemned not because he had wealth but because he did not provide for Lazarus from his wealth) and Acts 5:4-10 (Ananias and Sapphira are struck dead, not because they retained some of the proceeds from the sale of their property but because they lied to the community and to God). We can surmise that Luke’s community includes a group duplicating Jesus’ ministry in poverty and a second (larger?) group whose wealth is to be shared, not given away. While other explanations may be proven persuasive, it is clear that “both wealth and poverty were for Jesus among the accidents, not the essentials, of life; man’s real treasure, ‘the pearl of great price,’ is to live under God’s rule. Detachment ... was the way to contentment. Though it must be added ... Jesus never counseled detachment about other people’s poverty; the duty of everyone who has is to share, give, lend, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give hospitality to the homeless” (R.E.O. White, *Luke’s Case for Christianity* [Harrisburg, Pa.: Morehouse Publishing, 1987], 84).

Bovon has noted that different exegetes have found different aspects central to the narrative: “Peter’s pre-eminence and the missionary responsibility of the apostles; the apostolic office, which depends only on the gracious call of Christ, not on the ethical character of the apostles; doubt and belief, forgiveness and the power of Christ, about which every Christian who is set to be a fisher of people knows; the opening of the church not only to Jews but also to Gentiles” (Bovon, *Commentary*, 171). To these I would add the question of the proper use of possessions. No matter which is taken to be central to this narrative, they are all issues which Luke asks the readers of Luke-Acts to address. As the lectionary unfolds, the church will have ample opportunity to wrestle with each one.

Additional Resources

- [The Text this Week](#) – a huge archive of commentaries, blogs, sermons, etc. Note – this site collects resources related to ALL of the lectionary texts for a given week...not all will relate to the passage(s) being studied, but many will. You will have to sift!
- Check out other commentaries available for these texts (and others!) at [WorkingPreacher.org](#).

Reflection Questions on Luke 5:1-11

- 1.** What is more miraculous? The abundant catch of fish after a night of fruitless effort? The response of this trio of fishermen who leave everything behind to follow Jesus? Jesus' calling and eventual entrusting of the gospel to a group of mostly blue-collar laborers? What makes something truly "miraculous"?
- 2.** Many commentators have pointed out that the "deep water" into which Jesus instructed Simon Peter to put out his net for a catch is deeply evocative of the primordial sea – the Jewish symbol for chaos (e.g. Genesis 1). What might this symbolic connection say about the risks/rewards of discipleship (and of life for that matter)?
- 3.** From Ronald J. Allen (*workingpreacher.org*, 2/10/2019): *Two important issues in the community to which Luke wrote are in the background of Luke 5:1-11: authority and mission. Authority: who should the community believe? Mission: what should the community do in its context? These questions were important, as Luke's congregation was in a network of competing claims and tensions regarding traditional Judaism, the Roman Empire, and within the congregation itself.* We likewise live in the midst of competing claims and tensions for our attention and allegiance, our loyalty and our service. What does this story spark in you as you consider how our faith community responds to the call of Jesus in our own unique context and conflicts today?

What questions do you have?

What do you "wonder" about when reading these passages?