

Three Dimensions of Discipleship

Luke 5:1-11 (February 6, 2022)

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5Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ²he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. ⁴When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” ⁵Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” ⁶When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” ⁹For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” ¹¹When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Historical Context

The “fish for people” (or “fishers of men”) metaphor does not appear in Luke, but only in the parallel accounts (Matthew 4:19//Mark 1:17). Luke’s verb is *zōgreō* (simply “to catch”), while in the other accounts a noun is used, *halieis* (“fishermen,” plural), addressed to both Peter and Andrew. The status of Peter is obviously important in Luke’s account. Not only was Peter prominent in the traditions that Luke received concerning the earthly Jesus and his companions, but Luke knew that Peter was an important leader in the early church, as he narrates in Acts 1-11.

Theme: Three Dimensions of Discipleship

Set within the context of Luke's Gospel, as it moves into the Book of Acts, this passage is significant for Luke's unfolding theology of the church and its mission. In the metaphor of needing help with the large catch of fish, Luke presents the Christian vocation as one of mutual labor in following both the person and the word of Jesus. In that context, the tremendous success of Jesus' ministry, the sheer numbers in the crowds, required help in continuing to proclaim the message. To that end, Jesus gathered around him those who were willing to leave everything to follow him. For the disciples, this following was not just adoration and wonder at a miracle worker, but was a shaping of who they would become as leaders of the community of faith. They would make the same journey that Jesus would make to Jerusalem. But for most of them, the journey would not end there, but would continue throughout the world.

Yet, to face what they would later face as they proclaimed the good news, they needed to know who they followed, and whose strength would sustain them. Peter was confronted with the power of God that not only called him to self-confession, but assured him of his mission to the world. That power and that mission would result in a large "catch of fish," as the stories about the growth of the church in Acts confirm. The three scenes of this text then unfold three dimensions of discipleship: (1) the recognition of the power of Jesus, (2) the response of confession, and (3) the assurance of mission and success by following God's word. These three dimensions are not only the heart of this passage, but form a major theme of Luke-Acts.