

HEARERS OF THE WORD

Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3-8; Psalm 138; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11

Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people

Luke 5:1 Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, 2 he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 3 He 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. 4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." 5 Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." 6 When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. 7 So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. 8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" 9 For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; 10 and 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." 11 When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The call stories in Matthew and Mark are devoid of incident and biographical interest. We never learn about previous experience, impression made, or, for that matter, whether any of the called would have been on some kind of spiritual quest. All such details are suppressed, to allow the authority of the Son of Man to stand out in a stark way. Luke takes a different tack: Jesus has already been preaching and his fame is widespread.

In the construction of this passage here, Luke combines the call stories, taken presumably from Mark, with the story of the miraculous catch of fish. The provenance of that story remains a puzzle, because a similar story is elsewhere recounted only as a resurrection appearance narrative in the Fourth Gospel (John 21:1-11). In any case, Luke provides us with a more psychologically believable account of the call: Peter hears the preaching of Jesus and sees the miraculous catch of fish and only then is called and responds unhesitatingly.

KIND OF WRITING

The selection made for today is a combination of the call story (technically a *chreia*) and the miraculous catch of fish (technically a *theophany*). As the text stands, the call story is interwoven into the account of the miracle and cannot be easily "extracted" from it. You might even notice that the call proper is more implicit than explicit. The miraculous catch of fish illustrates well the experience of the sacred (*mysterium*) as awesome (*tremendum*) and as inviting (*fascinans*). The impact of the sacred draws Peter to Jesus, while at the same time creating a sense of unworthiness and distance.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

Miraculous catches of fish are unknown in the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament (but cf. miraculous provisions such as 1 Kings 17 and 2 Kings 4). On the other hand, call stories and theophanies are well represented. Today's first reading is a good example, showing the same features (mentioned below) of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. Other examples:

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a

Thought for the day

We tend to think of the first disciples as somehow "clergy" with a call special to them. But that is not adequate. Jesus is first of all calling disciples, that is ordinary people, including ourselves. Discipleship includes experience, learning and risk. What experiences have brought me this far? What have I learned and am I still learning? How about the call to "put out into the deep"? Is the Lord asking of me a deeper following, both costly and life-giving? How am I responding? Is there something in me hesitating and holding back? Do I need to hear again the words, "Do not be afraid"?

Prayer

God of surprises, help us to take the risk of following Jesus on a path of discipleship costing "not less than everything." Help us to let go, that we may live the Gospel fully and richly.

bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing; yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. (Exodus 3:1-6)

Then the spirit lifted me up, and as the glory of the LORD rose from its place, I heard behind me the sound of loud rumbling; it was the sound of the wings of the living creatures brushing against one another; and the sound of the wheels beside them, that sounded like a loud rumbling. The spirit lifted me up and bore me away; I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the LORD being strong upon me. I came to the exiles at Tel-abib, who lived by the river Chebar. And I sat there among

them, stunned, for seven days. (Ezekiel 3:12-15)

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him. (Mark 1:16-20)

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. (John 21:1-11)

ST PAUL

But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to

hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:14-17)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 1 Gennesaret = sea of Galilee or of Tiberias. “Word of God” is an expression taken from the prophets, where it appears usually as the Word of the Lord. The expression is used a few times in this Gospel: Luke 3:2; 5:1; 8:11, 21; 11:28. The presence of many people eager for the word gives a context for the preaching from a boat as well as a context for the call of the first disciples.

Verse 2 Two boats bring to mind Simon and his brother Andrew, although Andrew is not mentioned in Luke’s account. He is named explicitly after Simon in 6:14.

Verse 3 The unquestioning assistance hints at the immediacy of response to the call later. At the centre stands Jesus the attractive bearer of God’s word, the prophet.

Verse 4 Advice to a fisherman from a carpenter! There is no motive given for this advice, because we, the readers, do not as yet know that they have not been successful. In later Christian reading, the invitation to “put out into deep water” is read metaphorically (quite fittingly).

Verse 5 The fact of failure and the readiness to obey are both in the one verse. Peter trusts the word of Jesus and responds. Word is *rhēma*, a frequent word for Luke (68 in the New Testament; of which 33 in Luke-Acts). Cf. Then Mary said, “*Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word (rhēma).*” (Luke 1:38) “*Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing (rhēma) that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.*” (Luke 2:15) More sharply: *The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word (rhēma) of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.”* (Luke 22:61)

Verse 6 The miraculous event is immediate and overwhelming. The verse can also be read metaphorically. In the Acts, so many are coming and going that more help is needed. *Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the*

Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. (Acts 6:1) Cf. Lk 10:1-2 and Acts 11:19-26).

Verse 7 This verse also can also be read at another level to speak to current experience.

Verse 8 Peter is both drawn and overawed. This moment fulfils exactly the reaction to the *mysterium*, a reaction of awe and spontaneous unworthiness.

Verse 9 “They” includes the unnamed brother.

Verse 10 This is Luke’s reading of the call story. Cf. *And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”* (Mark 1:17) The reassurance is part of all theophanies in the Bible.

Verse 11 The call story itself is a response to the previous “from now on you will be catching people”. Because Jesus is a prophet powerful not only in word but also in deed, the utterly open and unrestrained response makes sense.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. The invitation from Jesus to put out the net again, with surprising results. Have there been times when you had little hope of results, but decided to try once again and were pleasantly surprised by what happened?

2. “Put out into the deep water”. When have you found that blessings, or progress, came when you had the courage to venture into unfamiliar waters, where you felt uneasy and insecure? What, or who, helped to give you that courage?

3. Simon had a profound sense of a power at work that he could not understand. When have you had a sense of the divine breaking into everyday experience?

4. The disciples “left everything and followed Jesus”. This step was preceded by their experience of the concern of Jesus for them, the attraction of his work, teaching and actions. Recall the story of key decisions or turning points in your life. Who was Jesus for you in those situations?

PRAYER

Most holy God, the earth is filled with your glory and in your presence angels stand in awe. Enlarge our vision, that we may recognise your power at work in your Son and join the apostles and prophets as heralds of your saving word.

We proclaim and so you have come to believe

1Cor. 15:1 Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, 2 through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

1Cor. 15:3 For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, 4 and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. 11 Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

Karl Barth said of this chapter that “it forms not only the close and crown of the whole epistle, but also provides the key to its meaning from which light is shed on to the whole, and it become intelligible...as a unity.” The key is God’s *grace*, disclosed not only in Jesus’ death and also in his resurrection. On account of the start of Lent, we hear only the opening of this great chapter. It is not at all forbidden to read it all!

CONTEXT IN THE COMMUNITY

Among the divisions and problems in the Corinthians community we find that some Christians there believed fully in Jesus risen from the dead but did not believe that the dead would rise in Christ. In contemporary faith, we probably find the same gap in understanding. Even in the Bible itself, for many centuries the Israelites believed fully God as saviour without believing in an afterlife. Nevertheless, Paul is unhappy and right-

ly. The late Jewish understandings of the resurrection show great variety. In Paul’s apocalyptic grasp, resurrection is both an end-time and a communitarian event. Jesus’ resurrection is no mere resuscitation but an unexpected anticipation within history of the resurrection of us all when history is over. There can, therefore, be no separation whatsoever between faith in Jesus risen and faith in our own resurrection.

KIND OF WRITING

The sequence of chapter 15 can be best grasped in the light of ancient rhetoric.

Introduction vv. 1-2 The tradition
Statement of Facts vv. 3-11 Witnesses
Thesis I v. 12 Christ’s resurrection
Proof I v. 13-24 Logical follow through
Thesis II v. 35 What kind of body?
Proof II vv. 36-56 Using imagination
Conclusion v. 57 Final exhortation

Our reading encompasses the introduction (*exordium*) and the statement of facts (*narratio*). Paul is, therefore, laying the foundation of the future argument by reminding the Corinthians of what *they already believe*. He will then go on in the proofs to draw out the logical and imaginative consequences of those convictions.

RELATED PASSAGES

But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. (Romans 5:8–9)

Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Romans 6:4–5)

Paul an apostle—sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—and all the members of God’s family who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Galatians 1:1–3)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verses 1-2 Paul combines the language of Rabbinic tradition with the typical vocabulary of the *kerygma*. He ends with a scarcely veiled threat: *unless you have come to believe in vain*.

Verses 3-5 An even earlier credal statement may lie behind these verses:

that Christ died for our sins
in accordance with the scriptures
and *that* he was buried
and *that* he was raised on the third day
in accordance with the scriptures
and *that* he appeared to Cephas,
then to the twelve.

Verse 6 The note that some died is pertinent to the argument: even those who experienced the Risen Lord also die.

Verse 7 This must be James, the brother of the Lord. Paul regards him as an apostle (Gal 1:18-21). This appearance is not found in the Gospels or the Acts.

Verses 8-9 Paul too has an undeserved place among the witnesses. His call was a miscarriage, i.e. an untimely, unexpected birth. His persecution underscores the reality of his encounter with the risen Lord.

Verse 10 Grace frames this verse—but does not hide an outburst of pride.

Verse 11 Thus Paul closes his reminder of the tradition: Jesus is definitely raised from the dead. The Corinthians already believe this but some do not draw the logical consequences, which Paul will do for them, in a forthright way, in the first proof, vv. (12)13-24.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. We all stand in a line of tradition and are indebted to those who go before us. To whom do I owe my faith in Jesus, risen from the dead?

2. Paul notes the risk of believing *in vain*, that is without enjoying the richness of faith to the full. The key is a huge “yes” to God’s grace in Christ.

PRAYER

Faithful and life-giving God, all we have and are comes from you and you hold out the gift of life in abundance, both now and in the life to come. We thank you for giving us the victory in Jesus. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory

Is. 6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. 2 Seraphs were in attendance above him; *each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew.* 3 And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

4 The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. 5 And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”

Is. 6:6 Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. 7 The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” 8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!”

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The story of a prophet’s call is chosen to prepare us for the call of the first disciples. Verse 2b (in italics above) is omitted in the lectionary.

ORIGIN OF THE READING

The eighth century BC prophet, known for convenience as Isaiah of Jerusalem, is the figure behind Isaiah 1-39.

KIND OF WRITING

(a) This is a classical call story, told in the form of a vision, with the usual confession of unworthiness.

(b) It is also a classical theophany, an experience of the holiness of God, the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, in the words of Rudolf Otto (from *The Idea of the Holy*).

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

Holiness

For I am the Lord who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall be holy, for I am holy. (Lev 11:45)

Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. (Lev 19:2)

You shall be holy to me; for I the Lord am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine. (Lev 20:26)

So you shall remember and do all my commandments, and you shall be holy to your God. (Num 15:40)

ii. Call stories

He said to me: O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you. And when he spoke to me, a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and I heard him speaking to me. He said to me, Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have transgressed against me to this very day. The descendants are impudent and stubborn. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, “Thus says the Lord God.” Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them. And you, O mortal, do not be afraid of them, and do not be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns surround you and you live among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words, and do not be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. You shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear; for they are a rebellious house.

But you, mortal, hear what I say to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you. I looked, and a hand was stretched out to me, and a written scroll was in it. He spread it before me; it had writing on the front and on the back, and written on it were words of lamentation and mourning and woe. (Ezek 2:1-10)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 1 Cf. Ezek 1:1-3:11; 1 Kings 22:19. Isaiah sees God not in the heavens but in the Temple in Jerusalem, in the Holy of Holies. Perhaps Isaiah himself was a priest. Uzziah died in 742 BC.

Verse 2 Seraphs are imagined as supernatural beings, snake-like in form and

linked with fire. They cover their faces not to see God face to face. “Feet” is a euphemism for genitals. Flew: figures of transcendence.

Verse 3 This is the utterly sacred nature of God, *totaliter aliter*, in the old tag. The three-fold “holy, holy, holy” is used in Jewish worship since antiquity (the *Kédusha*) and also in the Christian liturgy.

Verse 4 Earthquakes are symbols of God’s presence, as is the obscuring smoke.

Verse 5 Naturally, the prophet experiences awe and dread before divine. Cf. “But,” he said, “you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.” (Ex 33:20) He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. (Ex 3:6)

Verse 6 His lips are cleansed in preparation for his call (cf. Jer 1:9-10 and Ezek 2:8-3:3).

Verse 7 A moral cleansing is part of the calling.

Verse 8 The plural of God is a reference to the divine assembly or council. “Here am I” is a great response across the Bible: Gen 22:1, 7, 11; 27:1, 18; 31:11 etc..

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. The call story of Isaiah is so special, it can seem remote from experience and yet, the response finds an echo in all our hearts, “Here am I, send me!”

2. Isaiah’s sense of awe before God is part of authentic experience of God. When have I felt the sense of awe, which can combine feelings of being near and beyond?

3. The moment of call has to be renewed again and again: perhaps Lent this year might be an opportunity to go back again to foundational experiences and callings?

PRAYER

God you call us again and again into your presence: let us hear your voice and may we respond from all our hearts. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE LITURGY

Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3-8; Psalm 138; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11

READINGS 1 AND 3

The first reading and the Gospel go really well together: Peter’s sense of awe before Jesus is anticipated in the call story of Isaiah and his awe before God.

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

The sense of tremendous awe is continued in the Psalm: *before the angels I will bless you, O Lord.*

SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

First Reading

Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3-8

You will recognise in this scene words we use every day in the Mass: *holy, holy, holy*. The words come from the written account of the call of Isaiah the prophet. It might help to ask, how is God calling me today? Am I hearing his call?

Second Reading

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

The people of Corinth believe in Jesus risen from the dead, but can’t believe the dead will rise in Christ. Paul begins his teaching by reminding them of the earliest Christian tradition and creed. At the centre of it all is the conviction that Jesus is risen from the dead, as the earliest believers bore witness.

Gospel

Luke 5:1-11

This account—unique to Luke—invites different kinds of reflection. Not only “call” but also courage and “awe” before God.

WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

Monday 7 February

St Mel, bishop

1 Kings 8:1-7, 9-13

The setting of the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies completes the dedication of the Temple. As often, the imagery of cloud—revealing and concealing—conveys the presence of God. Notice the lack of any graven images.

Mark 6:53-56

The Gospel of Mark is told in an urgent,

breathless style. Today we hear one of those compressed summaries, capturing the popularity of Jesus among the sick.

Tuesday 8 February

St Jerome Emilian

St Josephine Bakhita, virgin

1 Kings 8:22-23, 27-30

Every religion has somehow to manage or negotiate the nearness of God (immanence) and the beyond of God (transcendence). Solomon gets it right, in this moving prayer.

Mark 7:1-13

Before we plunge into a condemnation of the shallowness of the Pharisees, it is worth remembering that the rules were designed to bring an experience of God’s presence into the everyday. Of course, they could become obsessive and pointless—features not unknown in the churches’ various devotions! Jesus is sharp in his response, but not any more sharp than any of the prophets of old.

Wednesday 9 February

1 Kings 10:1-10

Finally, the famous queen of Sheba visits to sample the wisdom of Solomon—which she (rightly) attributes to God.

Mark 7:14-23

This Gospel reflects an important moment for early Christianity. Although tied to a historical context, the principles are timeless. It is what is on the inside which counts.

Thursday 10 February

St Scholastica, virgin

1 Kings 11:4-13

Under the guise of a prophetic judgment, the reading offers a broader “reading” of Israelite history: idolatry has disastrous consequences.

Mark 7:24-30

This story has always appealed — perhaps even more today. Jesus *learns* — and at the hands of a woman!



Friday 11 February

Our Lady of Lourdes

1 Kings 11:29-32, 12:19

This rather mysterious reading illustrates something familiar: frequently the prophets demonstrate their teaching with an action or a gesture, as in this reading.

Mark 7:31-37

A phrase from this Gospel has found its way into our baptismal ceremony. The priest touches the ears and mouth of the baby and says “*ephphatha*”. Today we get the context. We too can pray that our ears may be opened to the Gospel and that our mouths may be opened to proclaim it.

Saturday 12 February

1 Kings 12:26-32, 13:33-34

This story should sound familiar: it is another version of the golden calf. The setting up of another sanctuary splits the people of Israel.

Mark 8:1-10

To hear this familiar story in a fresh way, it may help to notice that it is Jesus who identifies the needs of his followers. Sometimes, we fail to notice our own deeper needs — to be met in Christ.

