

THE CALLING OF THE TWELVE

September 22, 2019
1st Sunday of Luke
Revision F

Gospel: Luke 5:1-11

In the West, today's Gospel lesson is used either on the 5th Sunday after Pentecost or the 5th Sunday after Epiphany. In the Eastern lectionary, today's Gospel lesson from Matthew 4 is used also for the Second Sunday after Pentecost.

This Sunday's Gospel is about the calling of four of the Twelve and concludes with them leaving everything to follow the Lord. To understand some of the details, we need to understand what fishing was like on the Sea of Galilee and also what it meant for them to leave everything.

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Background: The Life of Jesus and the Twelve

This was not the first contact Jesus ever made with Peter, Andrew, James and John. James and John were Jesus' 2nd cousins and had known Him since they were children. Many of the Twelve were with Jesus at the wedding feast at Cana, which occurred just before Passover earlier in the year, which was 27 AD (John 2). They were there when John the Baptist pointed out Jesus as the One he came to announce (John 3). At that time, Jesus was baptizing more disciples than John, where Jesus' disciples actually did the baptizing (John 4:2). Prior to that, some of the Twelve had been disciples of John the Baptist (John 1:36-37). They had recently traveled with Jesus back and forth from Galilee and were there with the Samaritan woman by the well in Sychar (John 4). The reading from Luke 5 is set late in the year 27, the first year of Jesus' public ministry, which began just before Passover at Cana. The Twelve were not necessarily full-time disciples yet. They were still working at their trade, perhaps to earn enough that they could travel with Jesus part-time. After they made their decisions to follow Jesus full-time, some of the Holy Women pitched in to help support them (Luke 8:2-3).

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Background: Fishing in the Sea of Galilee

Fishing on the Sea of Galilee changed very little between the 1st Century and the middle of the 20th Century. By the 1950's, synthetic fiber nets replaced cotton and linen, motors replaced oars and sails and electronic fish-finders came into use. Not surprisingly, fish hauls increased and indigenous species began to be depleted; new species were introduced.

Types of Fish Present

In the 1st Century, four species of fish were common. The first was a catfish, which was of no economic importance because it was "unclean". From Leviticus 11:9-12, seafood must have fins and scales to be kosher; catfish have no scales.

The second species was the sardine and represented about half the yearly tonnage taken from the lake. In the story of the feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:9-10) and of the 4,000 (Matthew 15:34-38) the fish that were multiplied were sardines. The city of Magdala on the Western shore of the Sea of Galilee was the center of the sardine pickling industry in the region.

A third species of fish was the barbel, a member of the carp family. The largest of the barbels, the Long-headed Barbel, is a nice looking fish resembling a trout that feeds on small fish and mollusks. The barbel can reach 30 inches in length and can weigh 15 pounds.

The fourth species of fish is called the musht today (meaning "comb" in Arabic) and has a long dorsal fin resembling a comb. The musht feed on plankton and congregate in shoals, especially as cold weather approaches. Since the musht is the only large fish found in shoals, this has to be the species involved in several New Testament accounts. The musht can reach 18 inches in length and can weigh 5 pounds.

The musht is a flat white fish and is often prepared by frying (compare John 21:9). The skeleton consists of an easily detached backbone and relatively few small bones, thus making it easy to eat. Since it is one of the tastiest fish in the lake, it has been called St. Peter's fish from an account in Matthew 17:24-27. Peter paid the Temple tax for Jesus by catching a fish (with a baited hook) and taking a coin from the fish's mouth.

There are two different opinions on why a fish might have a shekel coin in its mouth. Gower stated¹ that the fish involved was the tilapa, also called the musht today. Tilapa carry their eggs and later the young fish in their mouths. Even when they go in search of food for themselves, the young still return to the protection of the mother's mouth. When the mother fish wishes to keep them out, she will pick up an object (a bright one, preferably) and keep it in her mouth to prevent their return. In this case, Gower suggested that the fish had picked up a shekel coin.

However, Peter caught the fish with a baited hook; musht eat plankton and wouldn't respond to bait. Mendel Nun therefore suggested² that Peter must have caught a barbel, which is a trout-like fish that would respond to a baited hook. Local traditions, he said, later applied the name "St. Peter's fish" to the more popular eating fish. Nun doesn't mention what a barbel would

¹ Ralph Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times*, Moody Press, p. 131, Chicago, 1998.

² Mendel Nun, "Cast Your Net Upon the Waters", *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Nov./Dec. 1993, pp. 46-56.

be doing with a coin in its mouth. This miracle was so great that it would be a small extra feature if it were a musht that responded to Peter's hook.

Fishing Methods

Three types of nets were referred to in both New and Old Testaments. These types of nets have been used for thousands of years and require much different techniques.

The first type, a dragnet (Greek *sagaynay*), is the oldest type and is shown in Figure 1. Typical dragnets or seines were up to 1,000 feet long and 25 feet high. It was spread out by boat 100 yards or more from shore and then hauled to shore by a team of 16 men. Sinkers kept the bottom of the net down and floats kept the top on the surface. When the net reached the shore, the fish were sorted and the catfish were thrown away. This is the type of net referred to in Matthew 13:47-50. This net couldn't be used if the shoreline was rocky or had kelp growing near the shore.

A second type of net is a cast net or bag net (Greek *amphilblestron*) and is shown in Figure 2. This type is circular, about 25 feet in diameter and has lead weights all around the outer edge. After the net is thrown and sinks to the bottom, it is either retrieved by a system of cords or by a diver. When Peter and Andrew were called (Matthew 4:18), they were using this net, perhaps catching sardines. When Peter and Andrew left their nets (Matthew 4:20), they left the third type of net: their trammel nets.

A third type of net is called a trammel net (Greek *diktuon*). This type of net has three layers as shown in Figure 3 and was used only at night. It was not useful during the day because the fish could see the weaving and avoid it. Modern synthetic fiber, which is invisible under water, has made trammel nets useful today in the daytime. The trammel net was spread in a crescent shape roughly parallel to the shoreline. The boat that laid the net then quietly maneuvered toward shore between the net and the shore. All of a sudden the fishermen in the boat started making racket by beating the water with oars or stamping on the bottom of the boat. The frightened fish headed for deep water — right into the net and became entangled.

The trammel net was lowered and hauled up perhaps a dozen times during the night. Early in the morning the net was washed, repaired and hung up to dry, thus preparing for the next night's work.

A variation of the trammel net usage is called the veranda method³ and is used during the daytime.

Gospel: Luke 5:1-11, Matthew 4:18-22, Mark 1:16-20

Implications of the Miracle of the Fish

The type of net referred to in Luke 5 is the trammel net. Peter, Andrew, James and John had been fishing all night and had caught nothing. Jesus arrived early in the morning while they were finishing up using bag nets (Matthew 4:18) and He taught from Peter's boat for a while. After Jesus stopped teaching, He said to Peter, "Launch out to deep water and let down the

³ For more information, see Biblical Archaeology Review, Nov./Dec. 1993, pp. 46-56.

(trammel) nets” which had already been washed and hung up to dry. Peter protested that this was pointless: the nets weren’t useful in deep water, or in the daytime and this would require re-washing the nets; but he did so anyway. Having done so, Peter encountered such a catch that (1) the net started to break, (2) the boat almost sank due to the weight of the catch, and (3) Peter had to call James and John over to help, and filled both boats. The Gospel lesson account was especially remarkable because the fish can see the nets during the daytime and can easily escape entanglement.

Comparing a similar catch they encountered under similar circumstances following the Resurrection, they caught 153 large fish (John 21:1-12). These fish from John 21:11 were probably the musht since they were caught near shore (100 yards out); the haul was then around 600 pounds of fish, figuring an average of four pounds each.

Since the catch in our Gospel lesson was taken in deep water (Luke 5:4), it was probably a school of large barbel. In John 21, the 153 fish are referred to as “a multitude of fish” (Luke 5:6) and “full of large fish” (Luke 5:11). The quantity of the catch is referred to as “a great number of fish” (Luke 5:6). The net did not break in John 21 (although the catch was large) but the net did start breaking in Luke 5. If there were also around 150 fish in the Luke 5 catch, this would represent about a ton of fish, figuring 10-15 pounds per barbel. To get a better idea of the quantity of fish, these boats were the same ones that the Twelve rowed across the Sea of Galilee during a storm in Mark 4:36-38. In order to work at night to lay nets that are hundreds of feet long, the boat was a larger-than-average rowboat. There was probably room for at least six adults plus space for Jesus to sleep. This means that the boat could probably carry over 1,000 pounds of fish plus two crewmembers. Since both boats were filled to the point of almost sinking (Luke 5:7) this represented quite a haul! Especially since a good night’s catch (working all night, letting down the nets 12-15 times) was only about 200 pounds.

Peter, Andrew, James, John and the rest of the crew were understandably astonished at the size of the catch especially coming in the daytime. Peter’s remark “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man!” is reminiscent of that of Isaiah after having seen the Lord in His temple (Isaiah 6:1-7). Many times, the closer we get to the Lord, the more we realize our own sinfulness. From the Lord’s reply, “Do not be afraid”, there was more than just simple surprise but some fear and trembling also at the magnitude of the Lord’s miracle. One might note Peter’s progression over the course of the Gospel lesson from calling Jesus “Master” (Luke 5:5) to calling Him “Lord” (Luke 5:8).

Some of the Twelve had been called earlier, but as disciples, not as Apostles. From the Gospel account, they wouldn’t just go out into deep water and let down their nets for a stranger, especially being tired after fishing all night and just having finished cleaning their nets. We get some insight into the earlier calling of these same four Apostles by Jesus (John 1:43-51), where they were still part-time fishermen at that time. After the calling of today’s Gospel lesson, they left everything (Luke 5:11) and were soon sent out by themselves to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers and cast out demons (Luke 9:1-10). The earlier calling (John 1:43-51) is used in the Eastern lectionary for the First Sunday in Lent and focuses on the calling of Nathanael. The calling of the rest of the Twelve Apostles took place shortly after today’s Gospel lesson where the Lord put His team all together (Luke 6:12-16).

Tertullian pointed out⁴ that the Prophet Jeremiah had predicted the calling of the fishermen as Apostles. When the fishermen left their nets, they understood that this was what Jeremiah had predicted.

“Out of so many kinds of occupations, why did Christ have such respect for that of fishermen, as to select from it for Apostles Simon, his brother and the sons of Zebedee? For this account was not written down just to bring out Peter’s trembling at the very large catch of fish, where the Lord’s response was, ‘Do not be afraid! From now on you will catch men’ (Luke 5:10). By saying this, He suggested to them the meaning of the prophecy, that it was He who by Jeremiah had foretold, ‘Behold, I will send many fishermen; and they shall fish them’ (Jeremiah 16:16), that is, men. When they left their boats and followed Him, they understood that it was He who had begun to accomplish what He had declared by Jeremiah”.

Cyril of Alexandria stated⁵ that Christ caught the disciples as fish in His net as He showed how creation serves His commands. This miracle underscored what He had been just been teaching the crowds. Many others have done this same thing since then, where Christ fills the net with those who live in the surge and waves of worldly things.

“Notice that Christ not only preaches, but also displays signs, giving pledges of His power, and confirming His words by the display of miracles. After He had sufficiently conversed with the multitudes, He returned to His usual mighty works. By means of their pursuits as fishermen, He catches the disciples as fish. Thus, men might know that His Will is Almighty, and that the creation serves His Most Godlike commands. Since He had not taught them sufficiently, it was fitting to add some Divine work to His words for the benefit of the spectators. He asked Simon and his companions to push off from the land and let down their nets for a catch. They replied that that they had been laboring all night and had caught nothing; however, in the Name of Christ, they let down the net. Immediately, it was full of fish! By a visible fact, and by a type and representation, miraculously enacted, they might be fully convinced that their labor would not be unrewarded, nor the zeal fruitless which they displayed in spreading out the net of the Gospel teaching. Most certainly they should catch within it the shoals of the heathen. But notice this: neither Simon nor his companions could draw the net to land; they were speechless from fright and astonishment – for their wonder had made them mute. They therefore beckoned to their partners who shared their labors in fishing to come and help them in securing their prey. For many have taken part with the holy Apostles in their labors, and still do so, especially such as search into the meaning of what is written in the holy Gospels. Others besides them, even the pastors, teachers and rulers of the people, who are skilled in the doctrines of truth. Still today the net is drawn, while Christ fills it, and summons to conversion those in the depths of the sea, according to the Scripture phrase; those that is, who live in the surge and waves of worldly things.”

⁴ Tertullian, *The Five Books Against Marcion*, II, ii, 4, 9.

⁵ Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 105.

The Humility of the Apostles

The beginning of the work of the Twelve Apostles was characterized by a deep humility and awe at what the Master could do. This kind of humility was also characteristic throughout the Early Church where people did good works without seeking credit for it. John Chrysostom described⁶ Peter's humble words, "Depart from me" (Luke 5:8), as the foundation of a blessed walk with God. As we apply this attitude to all aspects of our life and work, we will find ourselves praised by God and man.

"Let us beware of saying anything about ourselves, for this renders us both odious with men and abominable to God. For this reason, the greater the good works we do, the less let us say of ourselves; this being the way to reap the greatest praise both with men and with God. Demand not a reward that you may receive a reward. Confess yourself to be saved by grace, that He may profess Himself a debtor to you; and not for your good works only, but also for such rightness of mind".

"For when we do good works, we have Him debtor not for our good works only; but when we do not think we have done any good work, then this disposition itself is equivalent to good works. For should this be absent, good works will not appear great! In the same way, when we have servants (Luke 17:10), we should most approve them when, after having performed all their service with good will, they do not think they have done anything great. It was in this way that the centurion said, 'I am not fit that you should enter under my roof'; because of this, he became worthy, and was 'marveled at' above all Jews (Matthew 8:8-10). In the same manner, Paul said, 'I am the least of the apostles' (1 Corinthians 15:9); because of this he came to be regarded first of all. So likewise, John the Baptist: 'I am not fit to loosen the latchet of His shoe' (Mark 1:7). Because of this he was the 'friend of the Bridegroom' (John 3:29), and the hand which he affirmed to be unworthy to touch His shoes, this did Christ draw onto His own head⁷. So Peter said, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man' (Luke 5:8); because of this he became a foundation of the Church".

"For nothing is so acceptable to God as to number one's self with the last. This is a first principle of all practical wisdom. For he that is humbled, and bruised in heart, will not be vainglorious, wrathful, envious of his neighbor, and will not harbor any other passion. For if a man, by mourning for things pertaining to this life, drives out all the diseases of his soul, much more will he, who mourns for sins, enjoy the blessing of self-restraint".

John Chrysostom also stated⁸ that our life is like living in a foreign country, where the Lord's Presence is our real home. If someone were to repay us a debt, it would be better for us to receive it at home, not away from home. Yet even in this life we will receive a hundred-fold. The Apostles gave up everything, and the result was that the world opened their homes to them.

"If anyone were to owe you gold, while you were staying in a foreign country, and you had neither servants, nor any means to convey it across to the place of your abode, if he were to promise to pay you the loan, you would ask him

⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, III, 8.

⁷ Alluding to the laying on of hands at Jesus' baptism from Matthew 3:14-15.

⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, VII, v. 31.

to have it paid down not in the foreign land, but at home. In the same fashion, do you think it would be right to receive those spiritual and unutterable things in this world? This would be madness! For if you received them here, you would have them corruptible certainly; but if you wait for that time, He will repay you them incorruptible. If you receive here, you get lead; but if you get them there, it would be refined gold. Still He does not deprive you of the goods of this life. For along with that promise He has placed another also, to the following effect. Everyone that loves the things of the world to come, shall receive ‘a hundred-fold in this life present, and shall inherit eternal life’ (Matthew 19:29). If then we do not receive the hundred-fold, it is ourselves that are to blame for not lending to Him, Who can give so much; for all who have given have received much, even though they gave but little. For what great thing did Peter give? A broken net (Luke 5:6, 11), and a rod and a hook only! Yet still God opened to him the houses of the world, and spread before him land and sea, and all men invited him to their home. Or rather they sold what was their own, and brought it to the Apostles’ feet, not so much as putting it into their hands, so great was the honor they paid him”.

The significance of the Twelve Apostles is brought out by the question the Twelve asked Jesus: “What shall they have after having left all to follow him?” (Matthew 19:27) Jesus replied that they “will sit on twelve thrones judging the Twelve Tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:28).

When Jesus first called the four Apostles (John 1:42), He prophesied that Peter would be called Cephas, meaning a rock or stone. Cephas is a name that comes from the Chaldean word “*kafē*” meaning rock; “*petra*” is the Greek counterpart meaning a large rock.

A little over a year after the four were called, following the death of John the Baptist, Jesus made His famous statement about the Church and how the Gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). This was in response to Peter’s confession (Matthew 16:17), which is the “rock” that Jesus had spoken of earlier. Jesus went on to say that He would give the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven to the Twelve. Whatever they bind on earth shall be, having been bound in heaven. And whatever they loose on earth shall be, having been loosed in heaven (Matthew 16:19). The Twelve, who have established the foundation of the Church (Revelation 21:14) with Christ as the Cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20), have already begun to judge the Twelve Tribes of Israel and have been doing so now for almost two millennia. The Church today is responsible before God to maintain the connection with the Twelve and the Cornerstone in order that this just judgment may continue for our benefit⁹. In doing this, the Church helps us to focus on loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and strength, and our neighbor as our self. And by doing that, we will obtain a good defense before the dread judgment seat of Christ as we pray in the various services.

⁹ This theme occurs again in mid-July when the Orthodox lectionary remembers the Fathers of the First Six Ecumenical Councils.

Figure 1
Use of a Dragnet or Seine

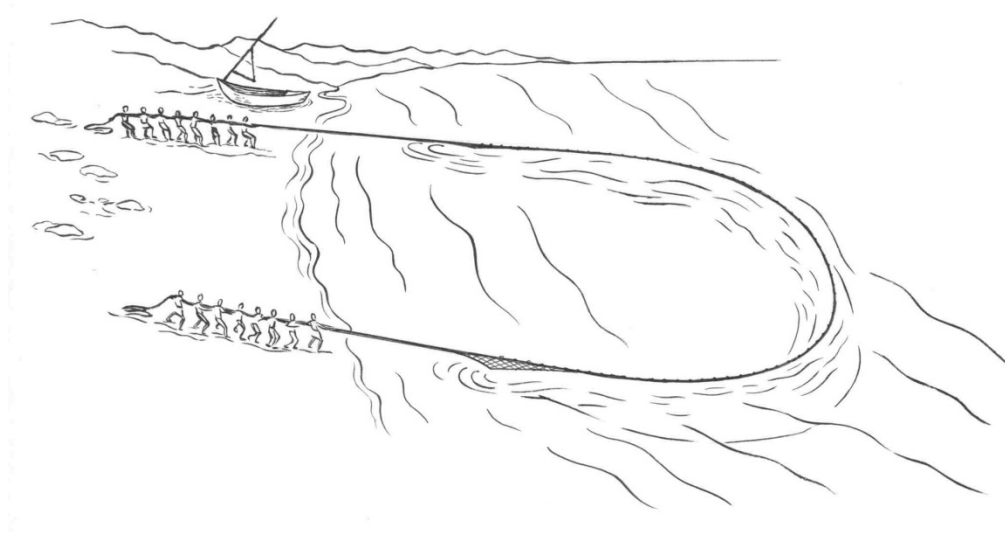


Figure 2
Use of a Cast Net



Figure 3
The Webbing of a Trammel Net

