

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Place a bible, lighted candle, and fishing or teaching symbol at the center of your group. Take parts in the prayer.

ISAIAH: I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?”

ALL: Here we are. Send us.

PAUL: I handed on to you what I myself received. Christ died for our sins in accord with the scriptures. He was buried, and in accord with the scriptures, rose again on the third day.

ALL: By God’s grace, we are who we are.

PAUL: Remember the gospel that has been preached to you and in which you stand firm.

ALL: We are being saved by it at this very moment.

The theme of call unifies Sunday’s scriptures. A call is a hinge moment that swings open a new direction and purpose in life. Peter is hauling in fish. Isaiah is doing his regular duty in the temple. Saul is actively protecting faith that he values and is trained to teach.

The list Paul hands on in Sunday’s second reading is the oldest part of the New Testament, the earliest creed. It ends with Paul’s dramatic call. A light from heaven strikes him to the ground, and he hears Jesus asking, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” Paul equates his call with

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

Jesus’ Easter appearances to other followers.

“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, 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. Then he appeared to more than 500 brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.” The call changes Paul from persecutor to apostle.



I came to appreciate Paul’s vigor when I took a three-week study trip called The Footsteps of Paul. We traveled 5,000 miles by bus from Istanbul southeast across Turkey to Ankara in the center and then Antioch, a city on the Mediterranean coast of Syria. Antioch was homebase for Paul’s three mission trips. Its Christian community supported his trips into Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome. Tarsus, Paul’s hometown, turned our trip west along the southern coast of Turkey.

A trained Jewish rabbi, Paul walked many of the roads we drove. In each city he began his preaching in synagogues and then established Christian communities.

In his first exhortation the Joy of the Gospel Pope Francis reminds the people of the Church that our baptisms call all of us to holiness. “May you come to realize what that word is, the message of Jesus that God wants to speak to the world by your life. Let yourself be transformed. Let yourself be renewed by the Spirit, so that this can happen...” (*Gaudete Exultate* 24).

- What is your calling? How did you find it? Have you found it?
- What image or words or person pesters you to take your call or vocation farther?

GOSPEL

Jesus says, “Put out into deep water.”

NARRATOR 1: One day Jesus was standing on the shore of Lake Galilee, and people were pushing close to listen to him. He looked around and saw two fishing boats pulled up on the shore. Their owners were busy washing their nets.

NARRATOR 2: Jesus got into one of the boats—the one belonging to Simon—and asked him to row out a little from the shore. Then he sat in the boat and taught the crowd from there. When Jesus had finished teaching, he turned to Simon.

JESUS: Row out into the deep water and put out your nets again.

SIMON: Master, we fished all last night and didn’t catch a thing, but if you say so we will try again.

NARRATOR 1: So Simon put out his nets and caught so many fish that the nets began to break. He called out to his partners to come and help him.

NARRATOR 2: Between them they filled both boats so full of fish that they were about to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell on his knees before Jesus.

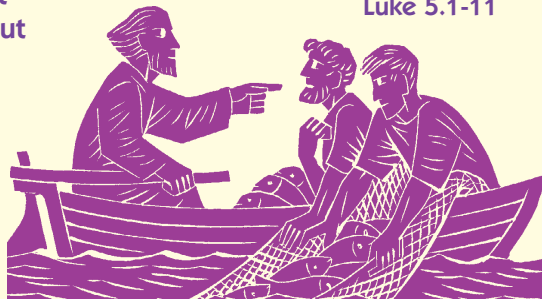
SIMON: Go away from me, Lord! I am a sinful man.

NARRATOR 1: Simon was absolutely amazed at all the fish they had caught. So were his partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

JESUS: Don’t be afraid. From now on you will be catching people instead of fish.

NARRATOR 2: Peter, James, and John pulled their boats up on the beach, left everything, and followed Jesus.

Luke 5.1-11



Luke narrates the spread of Jesus’ new community.

The evangelist Luke complicates the simple story both Mark and Matthew tell about Jesus calling his first disciples. Luke cannot tell the story of Jesus calling Peter without hinting at its ultimate result—the miraculous numbers of believers whom Jesus’ disciples have gathered into his new community by the time Luke writes his gospel.

Homilists often exhort us to respond to Jesus’ call with the

same instant wholeheartedness that Peter, Andrew, James, and John show in Mark and Matthew’s gospels. Jesus says come. These four drop everything and follow.

This is not the story in Luke. The third evangelist thinks the short, fast-paced scenes of Mark’s narrative keep us from asking, “On what basis do these fishermen decide to follow Jesus? What do they know about him? How can they abandon their

livelihoods and change their lives because a passerby asks them to? What kind of blockheads are that suggestible?”

In Mark, Jesus’ first preaching takes one verse. “This is the time of fulfillment. The reign of God is at hand. Reform your lives and believe in the gospel.”

In Luke, Jesus’ first preaching takes 17 verses. Jesus reads from the scroll of Isaiah in his hometown synagogue, announces he fulfills Isaiah’s prophecy, and infuriates his hearers by contrasting them with Gentiles in Israel’s history who accepted the word of God’s prophets. Here, as in last Sunday’s gospel, Luke cannot tell a story about Jesus’ early public ministry without hinting at how the story plays out—people of many nations will accept the one who fulfills God’s promises.

● Who or what has convinced you to follow Jesus?

Luke reorders the early events in Jesus’ public ministry. Jesus moves on from Nazareth to preach in Capernaum. The new order puts the call of Peter’s mother-in-law before the call of Peter, James, and John. Jesus rebukes the fever that has her in bed. In response she begins to serve him, making Peter’s mother-in-law Jesus’ first disciple.

Only after Luke carefully describes Jesus’ growing reputation does he tell the story of Jesus calling his best known disciples. Crowds press around Jesus to hear the word of God when Sunday’s gospel begins.

Jesus asks Peter to put his boat out a little from shore so he can teach from it. When he finishes

teaching, Jesus turns his mind to fishing for disciples and commands Peter, “Put out into deep water, and lower your nets for a catch.”

The poor night fishing and the miraculous day catch suggest in contrasting images the history of the first-century Church, in which great numbers of Gentile believers and not as many Jews joined the communities of Jesus’ followers. Two boats overflow with believers in Luke’s story.

In the A.D. 80s when Luke writes, communities of faith in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus have spread throughout the Mediterranean world. The response of the Gentiles has surprised Peter and Jesus’ other disciples in the same way the great catch surprises Peter in this story.

● **What attracts new believers to the gospel today?**

In Jesus Peter is encountering God at work in our world, calling him off the lake and into a future as a follower and a leader. Luke portrays Peter more positively than Mark and John do. Luke also respects the realism of Peter’s bumpy journey to true discipleship. Before his passion Jesus prays especially for Peter that his faith will not fail, even though the coming events will sift his followers like wheat (Luke 22.31-32).



The incredible catch moves Peter to humility. The divine action scares him. He falls on his knees and urges Jesus to go away from him. “I am a sinful man,” he confesses, acknowledging God’s holy presence in these actions. Perhaps he fears being asked too much. Perhaps in Peter Luke is conveying the fear of the friends of God for whom he writes. God’s inbreaking presence in Jesus makes profound claims on the whole hearts of believers.

Jesus commissions Peter in this humbled state, “From now on, you will be catching people.” Peter knows future catches will come as the miraculous catch of fish has come, namely, in response to the word of God.

God’s word baits the human heart for

liberation. Peter, James, and John leave their own nets behind in order to teach the empowering and liberating word of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

● **What inspires you about Peter as a leader?**

● **What fears are people in the Church feeling today?**

● **For what liberation is the Spirit baiting our hearts?**

Compare the beginning of Mark’s gospel with Luke’s rearrangement. What changes in Mark’s narrative does Luke make and why?

In Mark

- 1 Jesus announces God’s reign is near;**
- 2 calls Peter, Andrew, James, and John;**
- 3 cures a possessed man at the synagogue;**
- 4 heals Peter’s mother-in-law;**
- 5 prays before dawn and moves on to preach throughout Galilee;**
- 6 heals a leper.**

In Luke

- 1 Jesus arrives in Galilee and teaches in the synagogues;**
- 2 announces in the Nazareth synagogue that he fulfills Isaiah’s prophecy and infuriates people;**
- 3 cures a possessed man at the Capernaum synagogue;**
- 4 heals Peter’s mother-in-law;**
- 5 prays before dawn and moves on to preach throughout Judea;**
- 6 calls Peter, James, and John after a miraculous catch of fish;**
- 7 heals a leper.**

God calls Isaiah.

Sunday's first reading describes the call of one of Israel's greatest prophets—Isaiah, who in 742 B.C., the year King Uzziah died, saw a vision of God in the temple. In his vision the heavenly court and earthly temple meet. The train or hem of God's garment trails down into the temple from God's throne among the heavenly hosts. Six seraphim hold the throne aloft.

Hebrew has no superlative suffix, so the seraphim cry out *holy* three times to express that God is the holiest of beings, a cry we still echo in every Eucharistic Prayer, "Holy, holy, holy Lord God of hosts! Heaven and earth are full of your glory!"

The vision of God's glory filling the temple as it does the heavens affects Isaiah like the miraculous catch of fish affects Peter. Experiencing the holiness of God, even partially, reveals the sinfulness of the human heart. The vision utterly silences Isaiah; he cannot live after seeing this vision. "I am done for," he says. "I am a man of unclean lips from among a people of unclean lips."

But God has the initiative in this call story. A seraphim touches and cleanses Isaiah's lips with a glowing coal from the altar, purging his heart of its darkness. For 42 years, Isaiah speaks to the king and people for the Holy One of Israel. His visions of pounding swords into plowshares, of a prince of peace, of a shoot from the stump of Jesse inspire us still.

Here I am. Send me.

In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Holy One sitting upon a high and exalted throne, the train of God's garment filling the temple. Seraphim stood above. Each had six wings—with two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they hovered.

"Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh Sabaoth; the earth is filled with God's glory," they called out to one another. The door frames shook at the sound of the cry of the voices, and the house was filled with smoke.

I said, "Woe is me. I have to be silent, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live in the midst of a people of unclean lips, yet my eyes have seen the king, the Lord of hosts."

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, took an glowing ember from the altar with tongs, touched my mouth with it, and said, "See, this has touched your lips. Your wickedness is taken away; your sin is atoned for."

Then I heard the voice of the Holy One saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" And I said, "Here I am. Send me."

Isaiah 6.1-8

● To what in your life have you responded boldly, "Here I am! Send me!"?

● What obstacles condition your willingness to say, "Here I am. Send me!"?

● Isaiah's experience of the sacred enlightened and transformed him. What experience of the sacred directs your life?

PRAY

LEADER: To what do these scriptures call us?

Take turns responding with petitions and commitments.

LEADER: In union with the Christian community throughout the world, let us pray.

ALL: In your mercy and loving kindness, Holy One, you leave no thought of ours unguarded, no tear unheeded, no joy unnoticed. May the blessing promised to the poor in spirit lead us to heavenly communion with you. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.



Joan Mitchell, CSJ, editor of Sunday by Sunday, holds a Masters in Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School and a Ph.D. in New Testament from Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN.

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