

CALLED TO SIGNIFICANCE

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Luke 5:1–11

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” (Luke 5:10b)

Daily Bible Readings			
M	Jan 4	Called to Lead Israelites from Egypt	Exodus 3:1–12
T	Jan. 5	Called to Deliver Israelites from Midianites	Judges 6:11–16
W	Jan. 6	Called and Cleansed for Ministry	Isaiah 6:18
Th	Jan. 7	Single Mindedness Required to Follow Jesus	Luke 9:57–62
F	Jan. 8	Repentance, Goal of God’s Kindness	Romans 2:1–11
Sa	Jan. 9	Jesus Calls Peter to Ministry	John 21:15–19

STEPPING INTO THE WORD

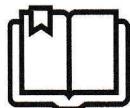
My husband and I had the privilege of living in Tel Aviv, Israel, for eighteen months when we were young adults. Over those months, we visited as many of the biblical sites as we could. We had the joy of visiting the Sea of Galilee several times in different seasons. The first time we visited, in winter, the lake was ruffled with small waves. The sky was completely clear, and the lake reflected the deep blue sky. Green hills sloped up from the lake, and we could easily imagine Jesus teaching from a boat, using the hills as a natural amphitheater. Compared to most of the rest of the dry Middle East, the brilliant greens around the Sea of Galilee reminded us of our home in Seattle.

Another time in the fall, we attended a church retreat on the shores of the lake. We were there several days, and every day the lake was full of huge gray-green waves. Those waves—almost big enough to surf—broke on a little beach. Compared to the Great Lakes, which also sometimes have reasonably big waves, the Sea of Galilee is not very large, only eight miles

wide and thirteen miles long. Waves of that size seemed remarkable to us, and it helped us understand the stories of Jesus calming a storm (Mark 4:35–41) and walking on water (Matt 14:22–33; Mark 6:45–52).

As you approach this story of Jesus' call to Peter, James, and John in the midst of the boats and fish, try to imagine the lake. Do you see it as vivid blue in this story? Gray and a bit rough? Can you picture a green hillside with people sitting and standing to listen to Jesus speak from the boat? Can you imagine yourself as an experienced fisherman who is asked to do something illogical—to put out into deep water to fish when there have been no fish all night? Can you imagine how you would feel if your nets were suddenly very full?

Lord Jesus, open our eyes to see you on the lake, calling Peter, James, and John. Amen.



SCRIPTURE

Luke 5:1–11

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. 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 to 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.

Note: Find Scripture Notes for this reading on the final page of the lesson.

LORD OF THE LAKE AND FISH

After Jesus' reading in the synagogue from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, Luke records several healings and more preaching in synagogues. The next major event is the calling of Simon and his partners, which happens when Jesus is teaching beside the lake of Gennesaret, also called the Sea of Galilee. This is the first reference in Luke to Jesus' teaching beside the lake. Crowds surround him, and Jesus has the clever idea of going out a little way into the lake on a boat so he can speak to the people and they can all see him. The boat he chooses is Simon's.

Simon and his fishing partners—James and John, sons of Zebedee—have been fishing all night with no results. Now they are cleaning their nets in the morning light. When Jesus gets in Simon's boat, Simon stows his nets in his boat, takes Jesus out into the shallows, and listens to Jesus' teaching. Simon is evidently impressed enough with Jesus that he is willing to obey Jesus' request to go into deep water to fish, even though the night's fishing was unproductive. Jesus' request seemed nonsensical to Simon, who knows the lake intimately, but something about Jesus compels Simon to do what Jesus asks.

The catch of fish is so large that Simon has to call James and John to come and help bring in the fish. Overfull, the boats begin to sink. Simon's response seems unexpected and even a bit odd: "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" Jesus shows his power and authority over the lake and fish. Though this is Simon's area of competence, Jesus' even greater authority showed Simon something of God's glory and power. Simon's awareness of God's glory reveals to Simon his own sinfulness.

Jesus tells Simon not to be afraid and gives him a new role. Older translations use "fisher of men," and the more gender-neutral translations use "fishing for people" or "catching people." Clearly drawing on Simon's profession as a fisherman, Jesus changes the goal of the fishing. Simon's focus will no longer be fish but people. Jesus calls Simon to join Jesus in ministry and frames it in a way that relates to Simon's profession.

Jesus' words about catching people are directed to Simon, but James and John join Simon in leaving their boats and following Jesus. This incident dramatically changes their lives.

② When you think of "fishing for people" or "catching people," what pictures come to mind? If Jesus approached you at your job and framed a call to ministry in language related to your job, what might he say?

SIMON PETER

A fascinating detail in this story is the way Simon Peter is named. Matthew records that Jesus calls a fisherman named Simon. After some time passes, Jesus gives him a new name, Peter, which endures in Acts and in the New Testament letter from Peter. Matthew 16:18 describes the moment when Jesus calls Simon “rock” (*petros* in Greek), because “on this rock I will build my church.” A parallel in the Hebrew Scriptures is when God changes Abram’s name to Abraham, “for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations” (Gen. 17:5).

In this story about the calling of Simon, Luke calls him “Simon Peter” once (v. 8), hinting at the future. The use of “Peter” indicates the key role he will have among the apostles. This story is where it begins: Jesus changes the focus of Simon’s life and calls him to significance as a participant in Jesus’ ministry.

The turning point is Simon’s strong reaction to the large catch of fish. The enormous catch of fish demonstrates Jesus’ power and lordship over the lake where Simon has lived and worked all his life, as well as the fish in it. In effect, Jesus shows he knows more about fishing than Simon does.

Mark and Luke record the presence of Simon’s brother, Andrew (Mark 1:16–22; Luke 5:1–11). Four fishermen, then, become disciples of Jesus, not yet knowing where Jesus will lead them.

A large catch of fish plays a role in one of the stories after Jesus’ resurrection. Peter has retreated into Galilee, still experiencing deep shame because he denied Christ three times on the night of Jesus’ arrest. Peter and six other disciples fish overnight and catch nothing. In the morning, an apparent stranger on the beach tells them to cast their net on the other side of the boat. After they catch an abundance of fish, John recognizes the man on the shore as Jesus, and Peter jumps in to get to him as quickly as possible. With this huge catch of fish and the meal on the beach afterwards, Jesus conveys his forgiveness to Peter and commissions him anew (John 21:1–14).

As described by Luke, the calling of Peter, James, and John is firmly grounded in a place: a lake nestled in the hills of northern Israel. The tools of a particular profession play a role: boats, fishing nets, oars. Fish, the creatures of that specific lake, come at the call of their creator and sustainer to crowd the nets of a man who is being called by Jesus to follow, learn, and proclaim Jesus’ Good News.

② Imagine God wants to change your name. What do you think your new name might be? Why?

STEPPING INTO THE WORLD

The incarnation—Immanuel, God with us in Jesus—is incredibly specific and localized. Jesus is born in a particular place, Bethlehem in Judea. He travels with his family to Egypt, then grows up in Nazareth of Galilee. In this story of Simon's call, the physical location and its creatures, as well as the tools of Simon's profession, play a key role. Today, Jesus is still with us through the power of the Holy Spirit, in our specific location, family, circle of friends, and church.

Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus is also present with us in our work, whether that work is paid or unpaid, whether that work seems significant or mundane. Not only is Jesus present with us in our work, Jesus knows more about our work than we do. Jesus is lord of our workplace, of the people we work with, and of the situations with which we deal. In fact, Jesus knows more than we do about every situation we find ourselves in, all our relationships and actions. This enables us to depend on Jesus for guidance, wisdom, and strength in all settings of our lives. All of our relationships and every place we find ourselves—at work, at home, on the road—matter. In every setting, God is there, the lord and master of all. Wherever we are, God wants to use us there.

Similar to Simon's call, sometimes God calls us to leave familiar settings and serve in new ways to proclaim the Good News in word and deed. Other times, God calls us to be open to having a new perspective on what we are already doing. Jesus invites us to see, more and more each day, how the Holy Spirit wants to guide us and empower us to show forth God's love in everything we do, a call as significant and powerful as Simon's call.

Jesus called fishermen, Simon, James, and John, to follow him and become proclaimers of the Good News. God calls us to do the same, and our calling works itself out in specific places and with specific people.

The musical *Godspell* puts to music a prayer many centuries old. Attributed to Richard of Chichester in the 13th century, this prayer captures the way God's call is specific for each day and each place: "Day by day, day by day, O dear Lord, three things I pray: to see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, follow thee more nearly, day by day."

② When you imagine Jesus knowing more about your work, family, and relationships than you do, how do you feel? How might that idea change the way you pray about work, family and relationships?

SCRIPTURE NOTES

The following notes provide additional information about today's Scripture that may be helpful for your study.

1. John records Jesus calling a few disciples who were following John the Baptist at the Jordan River, including Andrew. Andrew and his brother Peter were among the first disciples to follow Jesus (John 1:35–42). Possibly these disciples later returned to their regular jobs as fishermen.
2. The calling of Peter, Andrew, James, and John while they were fishermen is recorded in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 4:18–22; Mark 1:16–22; Luke 5:1–11). This is often viewed as a later calling to leave their jobs in preparation for being sent out as apostles of Jesus (Matt. 10; Mark 6:6–12; Luke 9:1–6).
3. In both miraculous catch events, the feat was made even more unlikely by being done after the expert fishermen experienced a fruitless night of fishing.
4. Jesus demonstrated his power over nature to these disciples again when he calmed a storm (Mark 4:35–41) and when he walked on water (Matt. 14:22–31; Mark 6:45–52).