

BIBLICAL RESOURCES



Amos 7:12-15; Ps 139 (138); 1 Thess 2:2-8; 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 ap-

Thought for the day

What do we do with the inheritance of St Patrick today? From the surviving evidence, we see man totally open to the call of God, grounded firmly in the Word of God and prayer, full of generosity and hard work. Legends about him abound, of course, but the spread of such accounts tells its own story about the impact he made. We too are called to the very same mission, rooted in Scripture and prayer, lived in great generosity of spirit.

Prayer

Renew in our hearts and lives the spirit of St Patrick, whose feast we keep.

peared to him in a flame of fire out of a 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 expe-

rience.

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 unre-served 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

O God, who chose the Bishop Saint Patrick to preach your glory to the peoples of Ireland, grant, through his merits and intercession, that those who glory in the name of Christian may never cease to proclaim your wondrous deeds to all.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

We were happy to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives

1 Thess 2:1 *For you yourselves know, brothers and sisters, about our coming to you—it has not proven to be purposeless.* 2 But although we suffered earlier and were mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of much opposition. 3 For the appeal we make does not come from error or impurity or with deceit, 4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we declare it, not to please people but God, who examines our hearts. 5 For we never appeared with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is our witness— 6 nor to seek glory from people, either from you or from others, 7 although we could have imposed our weight as apostles of Christ; instead we became little children among you. Like a nursing mother caring for her own children, 8 with such affection for you we were happy to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. 9 *For you recall, brothers and sisters, our toil and drudgery: By working night and day so as not to impose a burden on any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.* 10 *You are witnesses, and so is God, as to how holy and righteous and blameless our conduct was toward you who believe.*

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

Today's reading offers a tremendous insight in to Paul as pastor. It challenges us too in our own notions of what it means to be of loving service to people. Finally, it is a fitting reading for the feast of St Patrick, who began his own *apologia* with the words, *My name is Patrick. I am a sinner, a simple country person, and the least of all believers. I am looked down upon by many.*

KIND OF WRITING

In the *apologia* of chapters 2 and 3, Paul uses with great cultural sensitivity the language of Cynic philosophy. The Cynics (who were not cynics in our sense) often protested their genuineness and authenticity, as does Paul here. This passage is also full of the language of emotion and feeling, such as *affection, caring, dear* as well as family metaphors, such as children, mother and father. Nevertheless, this is the passage which indicates

greatest unease between Paul and the Christ-believers in Thessalonica.

Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is sacrificed on the altar? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel *should get their living by the gospel.* (1 Cor 9:12–14)

Stay in that same house, eating and drinking what they give you, *for the worker deserves his pay.* (Luke 10:7; cf. Mt 10:10 and 1 Tim 5:18)

CONTEXT IN THE COMMUNITY

Apart from the story of the somewhat unsteady relations between the Thessalonians and Paul, there is a particular feature here which bears comment. In an honour / shame society, to give is to honour the giver and place the receiver in a lesser position (“shame”). The social balance requires that those who receive should also be able to hold their heads up by making some return, however little. In Thessalonica, Paul “gave” to the Thessalonians the immense gift of the Gospel. They desired to make some monetary gesture to redress the imbalance thus created. However, the apostle refused money from them and in this way left imbalance as it was, breaking a cultural norm. This caused considerable irritation and Paul felt that, as part of the general restoration of relationships, he should also defend himself *against the accusation of taking nothing in return!!*

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 1 Although not included in the reading, this verse sets the tone: Paul sets about reminding the Thessalonians of his previous impeccable behaviour.

Verses 2 There had been some kind of incident in Philippi, reflection in Acts 16.

Verses 3-4 This is a very robust defence of the sincerity and personal integrity of Paul. In it, he uses the typical language of Cynic *apologia*, a mark of his awareness of the culture of the time.

Verses 5-6 Some of the popular philosophers flattered the audience in order to get more material support from them. Paul's lack of flattery is evidence of lack of greed. Paul's first defence is that he took no money because he was not greedy. It would be hard for the Thessalonians not to be against greed! Not only did he not seek money, neither did he desire status among them. “God is our witness” is an oath.

Verse 7 Paul is aware that the labourers are worthy of their wages (see 1 Cor 9:12-14 and Lk 10:7 above). He is aware that they wanted to give and, even more, he had the right to received. So, why not? The answer is in several steps. Rather than the imposing apostle, Paul became like a little children. The reference to our Lord's teaching leads to a rich exploration of family language. The mother in this case is a wet nurse, paid to breastfeed the offspring of others. But when she comes to feed her own children, she does not expect to be paid. The metaphor is powerful and precise.

Verse 8 This verse makes the implicit teaching in v. 7 explicit. His affection is great and because they have become so dear to him, he gives himself without counting the cost, as any parent does.

Verse 9 Paul offers a further defence: he did not want to burden them. The Thessalonians were manual labourers (1 Thess 4:11) and Paul did not want to take from people already evidently poor.

Verse 10 This verse acts as a frame on the persuasion which started in v. 1.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Who has been a really good “pastor” to you? What image or metaphor comes to mind to describe this person?
2. We are all pastors in some sense. What is your experience of not just serving but really loving the people in your care?
3. How did you come to realise that the Gospel is not some human thinking but God's message?

PRAYER

It is you, O Lord, who are out shepherd, leading us and guiding us through the pastors you send us. We thank you for the example and inspiration of St Patrick. Bless all who work among us in your name and may we see in them your love and care. Amen.

Go, prophesy to my people Israel

Amos 7:12 And Amaziah said to Amos, “O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; 13 but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.”

Amos 7:14 Then Amos answered Amaziah, “I am no prophet, nor a prophet’s son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, 15 and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’”

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

A distinction has been made between “the royal system”, which is one of exploitation, encouraging passivity, and “the prophetic system”, which is one of sharp, alternative critique, aimed at action and engagement. In the royal system, the establishment stakeholders all wish for convention and continuity, chiefly to ensure that those the top manage to stay at the top. The prophetic voice, however, breaks convention and challenges the primacy of the immediate past. Although there are prophets who are priests (e.g. Ezekiel), the priestly class in general supports the monarchy, on whom they depend. This is the background to the clash between priest and prophet in our reading.

KIND OF WRITING

Our story is one of confrontation between the royal and prophetic systems. It is interesting to note that Amos is not forbidden to or prevented from preaching, but simply told to do it back home. As Amos is not the speaker here, it looks as if this is a remembered anecdote inserted here by the redactor of the prophecies. By this time, Amos is well known and a danger. Perhaps we have here is the closure of his ministry in the north.

As a literary form, two scenes, vv.10-11 and 12-13 prepare for the tremendous and terrifying oracle in 14-17.

ORIGIN OF THE READING

Amos, from Tekoa, worked in the 8th century BC, during the reigns of Jeroboam II (786–746 BC) in Israel and Uzziah (783–742) in Judah. Although from the south (Judea), he worked in the north (Israel). He was relatively well off, being a breeder of sheep and grower of

mulberry trees. Nevertheless, he was unexpectedly called to proclaim God’s word away from home. It was a period of apparent consolidation and prosperity. Yet, in the prophet’s view all was not at all well: the landed élite had created large estates by taking the property of the poor. Against the leisure and luxury of the powerful, Amos preached justice. He also supported the Davidic dynasty in Jerusalem (Judah).

The book of the prophecies which has come down to us has had a complex evolution. It shows the following structure:

Superscription 1:1-2: the context of Amos’ ministry as a prophet.

Oracles against the nations 1:3-2:13: Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab and, surprisingly, Judah and Israel. The writing here is powerful.

Attacks on specific groups 3:1-6:14: the groups are all named and shamed.

Vision reports interspersed with oracles 7:1-9:10. The vision reports (very famous) drive the final section. Within the vision reports the confrontation at Bethel—our reading—is found.

Promise to the house of David 9:11-15: this concludes the book as we now have it.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

The ferocity of Amos’ invective may be felt in a few key passages: 2:13-16; 3:12 (NB); 4:1-3; 6:3-7.

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 12 The previous two verses as essential for understanding this event: *Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, “Amos has conspired against you in the very centre of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos has said, “Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.””* (Amos 7:10–11) There are three people called Amaziah in the OT. All we know of this one was that he was priest at Bethel and that he reported Amos to the king. Bethel: In reconstituting the kingdom of Israel, Jeroboam reestablished Dan and Bethel as border cults at the northern and southern extremities of his territory. “Conspired” is very strong, suggesting organised rebellion. Any undermining of royal authority must be resisted by the

“state church” at Bethel.

Verse 13 This is a perfect illustration of priestly support for the status quo. Cf. 1 Kings 12:31-33 for the story of Bethel as a royal sanctuary.

Verse 14 In effect, Amos points out that the priest (!) had omitted to take account of YHWH. This biographical claim has been understood in various ways. The traditional picture of a poor country lad catapulted to prophecy has to be set aside. It is likely that Amos was a breeder of sheep and not just a shepherd. The denial is also interesting. Either he is saying my authority does not rest on status but on calling or he is saying he was never a member of a prophetic guild. Either way, YHWH is sovereign.

Verse 15 In other words, it is not the prophet but God who decides the when and the where of a prophet’s activity. It may be that behind this verse is a conviction expressed at the end of the book that Israel’s destiny would be better linked with that of Judah. At the time, this would have seemed an unlikely proposition, because Israel was much more prosperous and far more powerful. Yet, Amos understood that the great imperial forces of the time—especially Assyria—would eventually asphyxiate the northern state.

Amaziah then receives a devastating oracle in Amos 7:16-17.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Sometimes the word we received in prayer or *lectio* is difficult and we are tempted to set it aside in some way. *But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.* (James 1:22)

2. The priest in the story attempts to compromise. He knows Amos is a genuine bearer of the word, but wants him off his patch, to protect the king. What has been my experience of such dubious compromise?

3. Amos is a straight as a dye. He knows exactly who he is and who is it who called him. Give thanks to God for such awareness in my own life.

PRAYER

God of the Word: open our hearts when you speak to us that we may hear your word, whether the time is right or not, as St Patrick did. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE LITURGY

Amos 7:12-15; Ps 139 (138); 1 Thess 2:2-8; Luke 5:1-11

READINGS 1 AND 3

Amos and Peter, centuries apart, go well together as both in different ways put to into the deep.

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Ps 139 captures something of the introspection of St Patrick, found especially in his Confessions.

SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

First Reading

Amos 7:12-15

Amos was called to go “abroad”, so to speak and so the reading fits the feast day.

Second Reading

1 Thessalonians 2:2-8

St Patrick was a generous and tireless pastor, much on the model of St Paul as we hear in this reading.

Gospel

Luke 5:1-11

Perhaps the strongest element in the Patrick story is his sense of call, echoed in this reading today.

WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

Monday 18 March

St Cyril of Jerusalem, bishop and doctor

Micah 7:14-15, 18-20

Today we hear a great prayer for forgiveness, a confident prayer because the Lord is our shepherd. It would make a terrific reflection on God's mercy and compassion. It does prepare us to hear with fresh ears the parable of the prodigal son.

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

As often, it can be hard to hear what is so familiar so that we are addressed again, so a special effort is needed. It might be good to focus on the stay-at-home brother and his resentments. Do I find such flinty resistance in myself? In my community? In our society? Even as we find this in ourselves, it is good to recall that the parable ends *without* resolution, open-ended, so that forgiveness

and compassion are always possible.

Tuesday 19 March

St Joseph, husband of the BVM

2 Samuel 7:4-5, 12-14, 16

God's fidelity *through time* is expressed in his commitment to the family of David, of which Jesus will be born.

Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22

Abraham trusted against all the odds — as did his later descendant Joseph.

Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24

Joseph of the Gospels reminds us of Joseph of Genesis, who dreamed and who saved his family.

Wednesday 20 March

Jeremiah 18:18-20

Jeremiah, an unwilling prophet, had a tough time fulfilling his ministry, with many threats and even being put in jail. Our story is told during Lent because the plots against Jeremiah anticipate the sufferings of Jesus in today's Gospel.

Matthew 20:17-28

Our Gospel is the charter of Christian leadership and it is very demanding. The sons of Zebedee have overstepped the mark, but its a bit rich of the others to be indignant because they are really no different. Christian leadership, rooted in the person and practice of Jesus, simply *must* be very different.

Thursday 21 March

Jeremiah 17:5-10

Two ways of life are contrasted today and, as always, the choice is ours. The contrast is sharply drawn. We do know that things are not so black and white in reality; however, the offer of two different ways of life still stands. The psalm going with this reading is perfect.

Luke 16:19-31

The story of the rich man (*Dives* in Latin) and the poor man, Lazarus, is unique to this Gospel. The story is pretty clear and it would be hard to miss the message. The exploration of the parable in the last paragraph, however, is larded with irony...are we among those who would not be convinced even in some-

one should rise from the dead?

Friday 22 March

Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13, 17-28

The ordinary mass goes might well ask why this reading and what is it about? The story of the rejection of Joseph by his brothers is interesting and significant of itself. Today, however, it is told to anticipate a similar rejection in the Gospel, the rejection of Jesus and his mission. In the case of Joseph, the rejected one became the saviour when there was a famine in the land of Canaan. Likewise, the rejected Jesus became a saviour but not merely to one family but to the whole human race.

Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46

In the OT, there are passages which talk about Israel as God's vineyard, a metaphor which undergirds today's parable. The parable on the lips of Jesus may have been simpler. The version we have in the Gospel reflects the context of Matthew's community and the later application of Psalms to Jesus' own death and resurrection.

Saturday 23 March

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