

The Lectionary

This text has parallels in Matthew, Luke, and John. Some of the accounts are longer than others, and some of the information given in some of them is left off or given in abbreviated form in others, all of which are common in parallel texts in the Bible and other places. Matthew's account adds information to the first part of this text, and Luke's account adds much to the second part.

None of these texts are included in the TLH one-year lectionary. Matthew 4: 12-23 is appointed to be read on Epiphany 3A in LW, and LSB adds two verses; Matthew 4:12-25 is appointed to be read on Epiphany 3B in the LSB lectionary. Luke 5: 1-11 is appointed to be read on Epiphany 5C in both LW and LSB. John's parallels are scattered hither and yon in the LSB three-year series.

There are probably several points of comparison between fishing for fish and fishing for humans, but the one that has to be the most noteworthy is the uncertainty of both. When fishing for fish, you can do all the right things, but still get few or even no fish. When fishing for men, you can do all the right things, but still get few or even no fish. When the Gospel is preached, the results vary.

Introductory

E.W. Bullinger was an Anglican clergyman who served as a parish pastor in the mid to late nineteenth century. There is a WIK article which details his life, including much of his often rather odd theology. He even has a theological aberration named after him; Bullingerism. I have seen plenty of odd theology in my day, and I'm not really interested in that or much of that sort of thing.

If the man was anything, he was prolific as a writer. People like me look at people like him and wonder at the amount of truly scholarly material he generated. His *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*, which I do not own, runs to 1040 pages and is available on Amazon (from \$3.88 Kindle to \$29+ hard copy), but not so much in libraries.

I do actually own a hard copy – it came with a CD, now where did I put that? – of his *Figures Speech Used in the Bible*, which contains about the same number of pages – you wonder if, on both counts, he said to himself “a thousand pages is probably enough” – and which I find to be very useful, as well as instructive about how God talks to us; He uses a lot of figures of speech.

Of the rather rare figure Hypocatastasis – I will quote him talking later on – He says,

So well known was it to the ancients, that it received this significant name. But it is, to-day, unmentioned by literary men though it is often unconsciously used by

them. Thus, their language is enriched by its use, while the figure is unknown, even by name!

He goes on to lament,

What proof of the sad neglect into which this great subject has fallen; and what an example of the consequent loss which has ensued.

This beautiful and far-reaching figure frequently occurs in Scripture. The Lord Jesus Himself often used it, and that with wonderful effect.

When I taught writing to high school students, I compelled them to deliberately use figures of speech. If they failed to do that, I would tell them to go back – it's pretty easy to do with word processing – and add some. That's how you begin to use figures of speech. At first, it's like pulling teeth, then it becomes easy as falling off a log, and after a while, it becomes old hat!

These people likely knew one another – in the way of things, some better than others. Josephus says there were 330 fishing boats on the Sea of Galilee. The fishermen fished the same waters and who were docked close together and who lived in the same town would have known each other as well as the captains and many of the crews of the fleet on *Deadliest Catch* know one another.

They also knew and knew about Jesus. In the text read on Epiphany 2A, two of them – Andrew (1:40) and probably Philip – are said (1:35) to have been “disciples” of John, who had been talking a lot about Jesus. Last week, we saw Him interacting with Philip, Nathanael, Andrew and Peter. Those interactions – including talking smack – indicate a certain familiarity between them all.

I don't think there's a theological axe to be ground here, but the idea that Jesus would rather randomly choose men for what will be a very important and daunting task seems unlikely. It's not the way the Church today does it. Nor can we fail to notice that four and probably six of The Twelve were either actual fishermen or involved in the burgeoning Sea of Galilee fishing industry.

He could also have chosen them in some sort of miraculous way, but I don't think He did, and I can't see where that's ever indicated. What is indicated is that the selection of The Twelve was done very deliberately, indicating that forethought had gone into it by Jesus, and why wouldn't it? That Jesus would use His brain to work through the choosing of The Twelves seems likely.

Indeed, in that regard, we would say the same thing about those choosing which men are and are not qualified to serve these days in the Apostolic Office of Pastor. Academic and other hoops must be jumped through just to get in, and during the four years of Seminary more hoops, including vicarage, then more hoops before one can be ordained, and every time congregations call a Pastor.

So it is that I have transitioned from talking about the selection of The Twelve to the selection of men to the Apostolic Office of Pastor in our day. I used to not talk about these things much, but

now I talk about them all the time. If people don't understand what a Pastor is and where they come from, maybe it's because the Shepherd hasn't fed the Sheep on that particular Word.

Like these and other Apostles were chosen and called to follow behind Jesus, we Pastors have been chosen and called to do the same. Modern pastors tend to get tasked with a lot of things – sometimes they task themselves with things – but our fundamental role is to handle the Word of God, to “preach the Gospel” in its truth and purity, and if you don't tell them that, then who will?

Textual Notes

14. Mark takes us from Baptism to Temptation to the time “μετὰ τὸ παραδοθῆναι τὸν Ἰωάννην – after the handing over of John.” The verb is an aorist infinitive, and refers to the arrest of John, of which we have little detail, but none is needed. After that “ἦλθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν κηρύσσων τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Θεοῦ – Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of God.”

A common thread running through the Gospels is the idea that John B was proclaiming the Gospel, and when he got thrown into prison his preaching scope was limited. Jesus is the next man up, and He begins to preach what John had been preaching. Then, knowing that He will one day leave the planet, He calls and appoints the Twelve to carry on for Him after He has ascended.

The Mount of Temptation is located east of Jerusalem, on the west side of the Jordan River, on the far eastern edge of the Roman Province of Galilee. If that location is correct, then Mark's words here have Jesus moving further into the heart of Galilee. Soon Mark will locate Him on the coast of the Sea of Galilee, the heart of the Province, where He will spend a lion's share of His time.

It was also the place where He was most warmly received. As He goes, He is “preaching.” The verb indicates the public proclamation of something, and it's a present participle – an ongoing activity, and preaching is always an ongoing endeavor; there will never be a time when there won't be preaching of the Gospel, save the apocalypse. The content of preaching is “the Gospel of God.”

The noun “The Gospel” occurs seventy-six times in the NT, and the noun “Preached the Gospel” appears fifty-four times. It's a compound of the words “good” and “message.” Grammatically, Mark's use of the noun allows him to specify exactly what sort of “good message” we're talking about; the good message about our good and loving God epitomized in the coming Messiah.

Preaching the Gospel is fundamental to Lutheran preaching. Or so we say. The Reformed assume that you already know about the forgiveness of sins, but what you really need to know how to be a better Christian. Roman preaching was once described to me by a former as “a lot of PSA's.” Such preaching is reflective of Roman theology, as is Reformed preaching of it.

15. He apocalyptically proclaims “Πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρὸς – the time has been fulfilled” and “ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ – the Kingdom of God has drawn near.” Both verbs are in the perfect tense – past action with results enduring to the present and into the future. What He means is that His own birth and epiphany is a real game changer; in His person He is found that Kingdom.

He follows that proclamation with two imperatives; “μετανοεῖτε καὶ πιστεύετε ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ - repent and believe in the Gospel.” Those are Law statements, and they command the listeners (second person plural) to change their evil ways and to believe that good message, implying that they do not currently believe it. Here, repentance means changing from unbelief to believing.

Probably our hearers are repentant and do believe the Gospel. Our hearers are, by definition, people who choose to come to church – a lot of people choose not to come. They come and sing praises to God, they confess their faith in the words of the Creed, and they come to hear the Word and to receive the Sacrament, now offered every Sunday at Immanuel, Grand Mound, Iowa.

Perhaps it would behoove us to acknowledge that when writing a sermon on this text. One of the basics of communication is knowing your audience, and the audience Jesus had there is much different from the one we have here. If our preaching takes the tack of a revival, seeking to wrangle as many new converts as possible, then it’s not going to speak to a house packed with Christians.

What I do find myself doing more as I move on in this work is talking more about Church History. After two millennia, the Christian Church does have a track record. The Lutherans have been around for over five hundred years, we are here to stay, and we also have done things. The fishers in this account were the first, but they were not the last Christian missionaries and preachers.

What that would sound like in a sermon is the preacher telling the hearer what happened to and through these two men after the Ascension. Each of them went to a particular mission field, each of them experienced mixed results, and each of them died a martyr’s death. It was the way of mission work then, it has always been the way of it, and it is the way of it these days.

We make a sharp distinction between the “mission field” and not. To be sure, there are differences in the work of a missionary to a foreign country and a country parson in rural Iowa, but both have sheep to shepherd, and both see part of their vocation to be preaching the Gospel to non-Christians and praying that they will come over. If you are a Pastor, then you have seen that happen.

Our country seems to be following the path of European Christendom; we are slowly but surely becoming a mission field. People are leaving the liberal churches in droves. With Rome, another day another story about pedophile priests or this or that scandal, and when does it end? They are like sheep without a shepherd, and many of them are seeking a shepherd faithful to the Word.

There are also a lot of Americans who have had little, no, or confused exposure to Christianity, and have not become believers. By “confused” exposure, I mean – what does it mean to be a “Lutheran” in this country? A lot of people think it means what the ELCA is and have to wonder what’s the point anyway. Some of those people, when exposed to Law and Gospel, will believe.

16. We get the idea that, as He travelled from the edge to the heart of Galilee, He did a lot of talking, and by that, I mean preaching on the go. Mark locates Him “παράγων παρὰ τὴν θάλασσαν τῆς Γαλιλαίας – passing to the Sea of Galilee.” The verb indicates movement, and the case of the “Sea...” indicates that it is His destination, as opposed to wandering hither and yon around it.

Last week, we noted that He went to Galilee for the deliberate purpose of finding Phillip, which He did. This week, Mark does not say that of Peter and Andrew. John has a fuller account (1: 35-42) of those brothers, read on Epiphany 2 in Series A. Here, Mark says that “εἶδεν Σίμωνα καὶ Ἀνδρέαν τὸν ἀδελφὸν Σίμωνος – He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon.”

Go ahead and remind your hearer that Simon and Peter and Cephas are the same person. Maybe talk about your name in Spanish (Estefan) and Greek (Στέφανος) or some other famous person who goes by multiple monikers. If you teach a little bit of biographical information about The Twelve every time they come up, after awhile people get to know them – maybe quite well!

The first pair of brothers were “ἀμφιβάλλοντας ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ - casting their net into the sea,” yet another present participle indicating that they were doing it repeatedly. It’s the way of things in fishing. They were casting nets “ἦσαν γὰρ ἁλεῖς – because they were fishermen,” and I count no less than six of that vocation out of the twelve called by Jesus to be Apostles. Coincidence?

Fishermen have a lot of pithy sayings, including “That’s why it’s called fishing, not catching,” and other variant readings. The nature of fishing, and the nature of missionary work, is that you do all the right things, and sometimes you get good results, sometimes you get great results, and sometimes you get nothing. That’s why it’s called missionary work, not making converts.

For more on fishermen, <https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/they-left-their-nets-behind>

Last week, I actually talked about why so many fishermen last. Firstly, there were a lot of them. Beef, pork, and some chicken are commonly consumed here, with the occasional fish. For most of human history, fish has been the protein of choice, so there were a lot of fishermen living on the northwest shores of the Sea of Galilee. Not many people in eastern Iowa make a living fishing.

A lot of farmers live in eastern Iowa, and many of them have livestock. I have five Elders. One is a full-time farmer, one is a pilot, one works in Ag, and two are half-time farmers with other jobs, so if you do that Math, about 40% of my Elders are farmers. That’s more than it would be in city churches, and that’s the first reason why about half of the Apostles were in the fishing business.

Another reason why such a disproportionate share of them were that is that – as we move through the Ministry of Jesus, He often speaks the language of the fisherman and boats. Here, for example, when He told them that they were going to be fishers of men, they well understood what that meant. That, and He often travelled by boat and once (more?) He even used a boat for a pulpit.

17. Jesus commands the brothers “Δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου – come, behind me.” The grammatical form is emphatic, the verb is in the imperative mood, and that’s a pretty hefty lifestyle change; from their current vocation of fishermen to fishing for men, which is what He says He’s going to make them; “καὶ ποιήσω ὑμᾶς γενέσθαι ἁλεῖς ἀνθρώπων – and I will make you become fishers of men.”

Jesus is the one who will make them become what He makes of them. The first verb has Him doing the making, it is in the future tense; they are not yet fishermen. But He will make them – the word is often used in connection with birth. All these things indicate that the brothers are about to undergo a major lifestyle change, and that Jesus is going to be the one executing that change.

Bullinger calls this figure of speech – fishers of men – Hypocatastasis, or Implication,

As a figure, it differs from Metaphor, because in metaphor the two nouns are both named and given; while in Hypocatastasis, only one is named and the other is implied, or as it were, is put down underneath out of sight. Hence Hypocatastasis is implied resemblance of representation, i.e., and implied Simile or Metaphor. If Metaphor is more forcible than Simile, then Hypocatastasis is more forcible than Metaphor, and expresses as it were the superlative degree of resemblance (744).

Of this particular verse, he says “The Lord does not say like fishers, nor does He use direct metaphor. The resemblance is only by implication” (747). I will not quote any of that on Sunday morning, but will point out the function of Simile, say that Metaphor is stronger, and then say that the manner of comparison here is both extreme and rare in the NT.

Well, maybe I would quote where he says, “this figure, therefore, is calculated to arouse the mind and attract and excite the attention of the hearer to the greatest extent.” Maybe. Better to arouse the mind and attract the attention of the hearer – and isn’t that something we strive for every Sermon – with my own words. I will reference Point of Comparison.

Exactly what is it about them being made into fishermen? Already mentioned is the very extreme change in lifestyle from being fishers of fish to being made into fishers of men. Not many men are Apostles, who have been selected to join in the adventures of Jesus for the next three years, not to mention the wild ride on Holy Week and after Pentecost.

Perhaps most emphatic is the impact The Twelve made on the world, and impact that remains to this day. Go ahead and review for your hearers to where each of them were assigned, and the response to their preaching the Gospel. Note that the Christian religion really took off in many of those places, in places like China not so much. Until now!

18. The response of them to Him is “εὐθὺς ἀφέντες τὰ δίκτυα ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ - immediately, they dropped their nets and followed Him.” The adverb εὐθὺς occurs eighty-seven times in the NT, and it means that without hesitation, they straightaway made a bee-line from where they were to right behind where He was. But first they dropped their nets.

KJV says they “forsook” the nets, and that’s good for that day, and maybe for ours as well. The rest of the translations say they “left” their nets, which does not well capture the moment. The words means that they let go of them – gravity made them drop therefore – and it’s the same word commonly used in the NT for “forgiveness” – the letting go of sins.

The aorist form of “ἠκολούθησαν αὐτό - they followed Him” indicates a one-time act in the past, and indeed it was that. Having heard the call to get behind Him, they dropped what they were doing – a phrase common to your hearers, and they followed Jesus. We would like to say that they never looked back, but that’s not exactly true, but almost.

19. Meanwhile, a little ways down shore, He saw James, who is identified as “τὸν τοῦ Ζεβεδαίου – the son of Zebedee,” and John, who is called his brother. When Jesus came along, “αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ καταρτίζοντας τὰ δίκτυα – they were in the boat, preparing their nets.” According to the web site referenced above, fishermen did a lot of that.

If you look at the thirteen occurrences of that word – almost universally translated “mending” – it means more than just that. The word is used to describe general preparation; they were doing everything they had to do to get their nets ready for fishing, and that included mending the nets, but more than that. One blogster says,

Mending nets was tedious work. It was routine, likely daily work. Spreading out the nets, sifting through them. Repairing holes. Retying knots. Cleaning out debris. Tedious. Monotonous.

But necessary. Having well-maintained nets is the sine qua non of fishing – without good gear, it doesn’t matter how many fish are out there or how good the fisherman is at catching them. If the greenhorn doesn’t set the bait correctly, it doesn’t matter where Sig (Hansen, *Deadliest Catch*) puts down the pots. Those pots are going to come up empty every time. I used to watch that show all the time, but like a lot of reality TV, over time it became more scripted, but I learned a lot about fishing and other things from them. As you know, when I tell people that, they – almost exclusively Pastors – are quick to inform me that “I don’t watch TV,” and I wonder why not, and then – oh, well I guess that explains a lot.

20. Showing no hesitation, showing Himself again to be decisive, “εὐθὺς ἐκάλεσεν αὐτούς – immediately He called them.” We talk about the Divine Call, but the word here simply means that Jesus shouted out to them. It does not say what He said to them, but it seems reasonable to think His words were similar to those spoken earlier to Andrew and Peter.

Using the figure of speech climax, Mark now tells us that these two “ἀφέντες τὸν πατέρα αὐτῶν – letting go their father.” It’s one thing for Andrew and his brother to leave behind their nets, i.e. their boat and fishing business. It’s quite another thing – a much bigger deal – for these two sons to leave behind their father to follow Jesus, but they did just that.

One more thing; they left “Ζεβεδαῖον ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ μετὰ τῶν μισθωτῶν ἀπῆλθον ὀπίσω αὐτοῦ - Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, they went away behind Him.” The one more thing is that Zebedee and Sons was a large enough outfit to support both sons and their families, and also to hire men to work for them. And on that bombshell...

Hymns

If you have not yet availed yourself of Lutheran Service Book Hymn Selection Guide, prepared by The Commission on Worship LCMS, then you should do that. It costs \$25, but you can download the Hymn of the Day only in .pdf for free.

Rev. Steven L. Anderson

Pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church
Grand Mound, Iowa