Lectio Divina – 5th Sunday of the Year C

Contexts

Luke's Gospel (in brief)

- Composed between 80-90 CE
- Part of a 2 volume work (together with The Acts of the Apostles).
- 2nd Century tradition names the work for Luke and claims he was the same person as the companion of Paul. However, there are significant differences between Paul's writing and what appears in Luke about Paul's writing which seems to suggest that the author of Luke was not the Luke referred to in Paul's letters.
- Author is clearly an educated man and a city-dweller, not a country-sider.
- Sources include Mark's Gospel and the Q source and a good deal of other material.
- From Mark: the narrative detail about Jesus' life
- From Q, the 'sayings' (teachings) of Jesus.
- Don't really know where the other material comes from, e.g. the infancy & childhood narratives.
- Work is addressed to "Theophilus" which means "Lover of God" – this could be a specific individual, or simply every Christian.
- An ordered account of life of Jesus and apostles
- **Structure of Luke's Gospel**
  Following the author's preface addressed to his patron and the two birth narratives (John the Baptist and Jesus), the gospel opens in Galilee and moves gradually to its climax in Jerusalem

  A brief preface addressed to Theophilus stating the author's aims;
  1. Birth and infancy narratives for both Jesus and John the Baptist, interpreted as the dawn of the promised era of Israel's salvation;
  2. Preparation for Jesus' messianic mission: John's prophetic mission, his baptism of Jesus, and the testing of Jesus' vocation;
  3. The beginning of Jesus' mission in Galilee, and the hostile reception there;
  4. The central section: the journey to Jerusalem, where Jesus knows he must meet his destiny as God's prophet and messiah;
  5. His mission in Jerusalem, culminating in confrontation with the leaders of the Jewish Temple;
  6. His last supper with his most intimate followers, followed by his arrest, interrogation, and crucifixion;
  7. God's validation of Jesus as Christ: events from the first Easter to the Ascension, showing Jesus' death to be divinely ordained, in keeping with both scriptural promise and the nature of messiahship, and anticipating the story of Acts

Luke 5:1-11 – things to notice

- Jesus has left Nazareth and will never return. He is by the Lake of Gennesaret (Sea of Galilee, Sea of Tiberias).
- He continues his mission of teaching, the crowd is pressing around him – Luke gives the impression of substantial group of people pressing around Jesus.
- Jesus is preaching the word of God – a phrase which occurs 14 times in Acts. Luke is using it deliberately to convey the idea that Christian disciples are/must be firmly rooted in the teaching of Jesus.
- Jesus takes the unusual step of teaching from a boat – which introduces Peter into the Gospel story. In Luke Peter (Simon Peter) is a hero. He removes negative remarks about Peter found in Mark. Luke presents Peter as founder of primitive

church in Acts; Jesus prays for Peter (22:31-32); Jesus appears to Peter alone (24:34). In Luke the spotlight is always on Peter. The other disciples are in the background.

- Note: fishermen in Jesus day were middle-class business men, not "poor fishermen" – note the reference of Simon's 'partners' near the end of the Gospel reading. Fishermen were engaged in an 'essential service' – providing the staple food – in the ancient world.
- When he has finished teaching Jesus asks Simon Peter to put out into deep water for a catch of fish. Note: Jesus remains in the boat.
- Peter objects – "we have worked hard all night long and caught nothing" – what would a craftsman like Jesus know about fishing compared to a professional fisherman?
- But Peter does as Jesus asks. It seems he has already been captivated by Jesus' teaching. Peter and his companions are cleaning their nets on the shore listening to what Jesus is saying.
- Note: terms like 'Master' and 'Lord' reflect Luke's understanding of who Jesus is, not Peter's. It is unlikely that Peter would have immediately recognised Jesus as Master and Lord, in the sense of what those words mean to us today, in this first encounter with him. It is more about Peter being overcome by what has happened and his sense that something great is at work here.
- A huge catch is made. Peter is overwhelmed; senses he is in the presence of someone great; he acknowledges the miraculous nature of the huge catch and his own sinfulness in the face of God's apparent goodness.
- Not only Peter, but also James & John were overcome and fearful – what is going on here?' they seem to be asking.
- 'Do not be afraid' – one of the most-often used sayings in the NT. A call to trust. A call to recognise Jesus' belief in them (in contrast to their lack of belief in themselves?)
- Jesus calls Simon to discipleship. "From now on it is *people alive* you will catch" means "from now on you will be catching human beings and in so doing bring them new life.
- The saying comes out of the Greco-Roman tradition in which teachers used their words as bait to lure students to themselves and through their education of them transformed their lives. That is the sense here, too. Peter will be catching men and women with the bait of God's Word (the teaching of Jesus) and drawing them to be transformed in the new life of Christ.
- When they return to shore they (Simon Peter, James & John) leave everything and follow Jesus – note the immediacy of their action & note that they left behind a thriving fishing business in order to follow Jesus – they don't know and don't ask what following Jesus is all about – they just do it. Perhaps Luke is sending the same message to his communities – it's time to get on with the job; think about what stands in the way.
- Peter, James and John become a kind of 'inner circle' among the winder group of disciples. Luke (and the other Gospels) will include of these 3 in several significant episodes (eg. the transfiguration).
- The story of the amazing catch of fish is found only in Luke.

The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on this Sunday?

The theme of 'call and response' is at the heart of both the first reading and the Gospel today. In the first reading the Old Testament prophet Isaiah tells his experience of God's

call and his own (immediate) response. In the Gospel, Peter, James and John also respond *immediately* to Jesus' call. They leave everything to follow him.

As if to balance the rejection Jesus experienced in last week's Gospel, this week's episode tells two stories of people who welcome his message.

Firstly, an enthusiastic crowd has gathered on the shore of the lake, eagerly pressing forward to hear Jesus' teaching. Jesus seems to be in danger of being crushed or at least being pushed into the sea. He takes the unusual step of teaching from Simon's boat.

Secondly, Luke tells us that Simon and his companions are washing their nets on the shore as Jesus teaches, no doubt also listening to what he has to say.

When Jesus finishes his teaching he asks Simon to put out into deep water and prepare for a catch. Simon protests: if they caught nothing all night, the best time for fishing, what hope was there of a good catch during the day? Anyway, what would a craftsman like Jesus know about the art of commercial fishing?

Nevertheless, Simon does as Jesus asks and an extraordinary abundance of fish is caught - enough to almost sink two boats. The boats once empty are now full to overflowing!

Overwhelmed by the huge catch, Simon sense the presence of the Divine and his own unworthiness and begs Jesus to leave him.

Jesus' words to him are both a call and a commission. From now on it will not be fish destined to be killed but living people that Simon and his companions will catch and draw into the community of disciples.

Amazingly, Simon Peter, James and John abandon their thriving business, leaving everything behind, and follow Jesus.

These new disciples of Jesus will use the Word of God to lure men and women to bring about their transformation to new life in Christ. The miraculous catch of such a huge number of fish seems to indicate that a vast number of people will find the way of Life in the preaching of the apostles.

Our call as disciples is not only to personal holiness but also to partnership with Christ in transforming the world and its peoples with words and actions of justice, peace, integrity, forgiveness, mercy, tolerance, hope and love.

First we must allow ourselves to be caught and taught by Jesus. The response that is asked for, it seems, is to be prepared to give up everything in our quest to know Jesus. In spite of our sinfulness, sense of unworthiness and lack of faith in ourselves, it is a call to trust in God's choice of us and in God's faith in us.

Another Reflection

The Transformation of Peter

If religion in general, and Christian religion for us in particular, is "doing its job", and we are genuinely engaged with an open mind and heart, then we are changed, transformed, to be ever more loving.

This gospel account gives witness to the transformation of Peter, with important lessons for us too.

At the time of this meeting, Jesus was known to Peter. For one thing, Jesus had been to cure his mother-in-law. Now Peter is back doing the normal everyday things that go with his job of fishing. It's been a frustrating night with no fish caught. Jesus appears and calls on him to go back out and try once again. Pragmatic Peter is not keen but, perhaps after his initial experience through his mother-in-law, agrees to trust Jesus and throw in his net again. What happens next astounds Peter and brings him to a new appreciation of Jesus and an openness to Jesus' invitation. Saying 'yes' brings a new understanding of himself; his transformation has begun.

This account is full of meanings for us to consider, digest and through which to be encouraged and inspired. Here are a few. First and foremost, Peter experiences Jesus, the Christ, firsthand. Without that meeting, that experience, there can be no chance of change. Where/when have you experienced Christ? From the feast of the Epiphany some weeks ago, we celebrated that God is made manifest, known, to the world. That wasn't a one-off event. God is being made known all the time. Are we open to that? For sure, we have the 'special' seven sacraments of our faith tradition where God is made known to us but there are also countless other times when God looks to break through into our consciousness. Think of all the people, places, activities that you love, not to mention the standout events that have taken place with, to and through you. Each of these can and has brought about a change in us. Can you see the 'hand of God' at work? And, if you can, live the joy of it.

Peter was doing his ordinary things, dealing with everyday worries and frustrations. In the same way, it is through the ordinary that we encounter God. As one writer stated, God comes thinly disguised as your life. No special effort is required to 'meet God'. We simply need to stop being consumed with our superficial selves and open our hearts, through prayer, meditation or contemplation.

Peter had to put his pragmatic ego to one side and trust. Here is our invitation also. Be brave, let go and let God! Especially when you know you don't have 'the answers' to problems, frustrations, obstacles. Ask. Trust. Listen with your heart.

Peter was open to the change that had happened. Perhaps we would have expected Peter to be full of gratitude for the fish caught. Instead, Peter goes further. He embraces the change in himself because he sees the infinite love and goodness of God that melts his superficial worries and fears and, while at first feeling unworthy, he is invited to wholeness, to a profound experience of God. Through our lives, do we embrace the infinite love and goodness of God? Do you love your true self because God is hopelessly in love with you? Do we harbour, like Peter, a sense of somehow being unworthy? So

much of our worries and suffering are self-chosen. Like Peter, we have an invitation to wholeness, to deeper understanding/experience and transformation. With this, we can then grow to be, as all Christians are called to be, the loving eyes, hands and heart of Christ in the world today.

I think the words from Frank Anderson's song, "The Fullness of God", are particularly apt.

"May the God of Jesus Christ, the Father we serve
Fill your minds that you may see, deep in your heart
What hope his call now holds for you,
His promise true, to fill your hearts with power to live the fullness of God."

Garry Montgomery (Parishioner, OLMC Coorparoo)
Readings: Is 6:1-8; Ps 137:1-5, 7-8; 1 Cor 15:1-11; Lk 5:1-11