

ROOM IN THE BOAT: LUKE 5.1-11 AND THE SYMBOL OF THE BOAT

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Introduction

It is widely held that Luke's account of the call of Peter (and James and John) in Lk. 5.1-11 is a compilation of the accounts of the call of the first disciples (Mk 1.16-20; Mt. 4.18-22), Jesus' preaching from the deck of a boat (Mk 4; Mt. 13) and the miraculous catch of fish (Jn 21.1-14). This study will examine the way that Luke's arrangement of these traditions, which all include some reference to a boat, functions to promote a vision of the Church via the metaphor of the boat. For the purpose of this essay the final commissioning scene in which Peter is called to follow Jesus is important only in that it adds a clearly missional emphasis to the other narratives. The primary focus is on the combining of the two traditions in which the boat is central. I will argue that this arrangement serves to leverage the symbolic payload of the boat to combat the idea that the Church is an island from outsiders and to emphasize that there is room in the boat.

Preaching from the Boat

Luke 5 begins with Jesus standing by the water and being pressed upon by the crowds. He steps into a boat that becomes the stage from which he addresses those gathered. This same setting is used in both Mark and Matthew. In this section I will argue, first, that the boat in all three stories symbolizes the Church. To make this point I will begin with a discussion of the development of the boat as a symbol for the Church, with examples drawn from Greco-Roman, Jewish and Christian literature. Next, I will compare the use of this symbol in the three accounts of Jesus preaching from the deck. I will

focus on the way that Luke's blending of this tradition with the fishing miracle leads the audience to an understanding of the Church that differs in important ways from that of the other two Synoptic Gospels.

The Boat as Symbol for the Church

The boat became a symbol for the Church in early Christian art and literature, and I will argue that there is sufficient reason to find the boat serving this function in the Luke passage. In what follows, I will provide a brief overview of the use of the boat as a symbol for collective fate and the development of the boat as a symbol for the Church. By the time the Third Gospel was written, the boat already served as a symbol for collective fate, and the metaphor continued to be used in later texts. The argument here is cumulative and attempts to demonstrate the presence of the metaphor in the milieu.

The Boat in Greco-Roman Literature

In Greco-Roman literature the boat frequently stands for the state. Most often, allusions to the state as a boat are made to emphasize the peril that it faces. References to the dangers of sea, storms and the threat of shipwreck are frequent. Thus, the image especially emphasizes the need for a common purpose and the need for strong singular leadership. In fact, the image of the boat was sometimes invoked to disparage democracy and call for the consolidation of power. Thus, Sophocles' Oedipus is urged to take charge of the city which 'is grievously tossed by storms, and still cannot lift its head from beneath the depths of the killing angry sea' (Sophocles, *Oed. tyr.* 20).¹ Plato employs the image of the ship for the state in his argument that it should be ruled by philosophers. He suggests that if philosophers seem useless to the city, it is only because their proper place at the helm has been usurped by a mutinous populous that knows nothing of the art of steering and lacks the wisdom to track the weather or guide the ship by the stars (*Resp.* 6.487d-488e).² Similarly, Polybius describes the Athenian democracy as:

1. Sophocles, *Ajax, Electra, Oedipus Tyrannus* (trans. Hugh Lloyd-Jones; LCL, 20; 2 vols.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

2. Plato, *Republic, Volume II: Books 6–10* (ed. and trans. Christopher Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy; LCL, 276; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

a ship [σκάφεισι] without a commander. In such a ship when fear of the billows or the danger of a storm induces the mariners to be sensible and to attend to the orders of the skipper, they do their duty admirably. But when they grow over-confident and begin to entertain contempt for their superiors and to quarrel with each other, as they are no longer all of the same way of thinking, then with some of them determined to continue the voyage, and others putting pressure on the skipper to anchor, with some letting out the sheets and others preventing them and ordering the sails to be taken in, not only does the spectacle strike anyone who watches it as disgraceful owing to their disagreement and contention, but the position of affairs is a source of actual danger to the rest of those on board; so that often after escaping from the perils of the widest seas and fiercest storms they are shipwrecked in harbour and when close to the shore (Polybius, *Hist.* 6.3-8).³

In Dio Cassius's *Roman History*, which post-dates the Gospel of Luke, Caesar is encouraged to take control of Rome, which is described as '[a] great merchantman manned with a crew of every race and lacking a pilot' that 'has now for many generations been rolling and plunging as it has drifted this way and that in a heavy sea, a ship as it were without ballast' (52.16.3).⁴

In Latin literature, we find a similar use of the ship metaphor. Perhaps the most complete example is found in Horace's *Odes*. Ode 24 is traditionally read as an ode to the state:⁵

O ship [*navis*]! New waves are about to carry you out to sea. O, what are you *doing*? One final effort now, and make port before it is too late! Don't you notice how your side is stripped of oars, your mast is split by the violence of the Southwester, the yardarms groan, and the hull, without the support of the ropes, can scarcely withstand the overbearing sea? Your sails are no longer in one piece, you have no gods left to call upon, now that for a second time you are beset by danger. Although

3. Polybius, *The Histories, Volume III: Books 5–8* (trans. W.R. Paton; LCL, 138; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, rev. edn, 2011).

4. Dio Cassius, *Roman History, Volume VI: Books 51–55* (trans. Earnest Cary and Herbert B. Foster; LCL, 83; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917).

5. Though, as Rudd notes, 'Some modern scholars have seen the ship as a woman, some as a poetry book, some as Horace's life' (Horace, *Odes and Epodes* [ed. and trans. Niall Rudd; LCL, 33; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004], p. 51 n. 29).

you are made of Pontic pine, the daughter of an illustrious forest, and you boast of your lineage and name, such things are of no avail; the terrified sailor puts no trust in painted sterns. Unless you are to become a plaything of the winds, take care! Until lately you caused me worry and disgust; now you inspire my devotion and fond concern. Make sure to avoid the waters that flow between the shining Cyclades! (Horace, *Carm.* 14.50-52)].⁶

Again, the metaphor of the ship is employed to show imminent danger. Livy uses the metaphor to show the need for strong leadership in troubled times: ‘Any one of the sailors and passengers can steer when the sea is calm. When a savage storm comes and the ship is swept over a rough sea by the wind, then there is need of a man and a pilot’ (*Hist.* 24.8.12-13).⁷ A similar sentiment is expressed by Cicero’s frequent use of the metaphor. In *De republica*, Cicero has Scipio suggesting that, at least theoretically, a benevolent dictator would be an ideal form of government. The benefit of singularity of leadership is expressed through the metaphor of the ship. When ‘the sea suddenly grows rough’ there is need for a strong hand at the helm (*Rep.* 34.63).⁸ In his letters, Cicero expresses his involvement (or lack of involvement) in the affairs of state with nautical language. After being exiled, he writes to Atticus,

I had long grown tired of playing skipper, even when that was in my power. Now, when I have—not abandoned the helm, but had it snatched out of my hands and am forced to leave the ship [*navi*], I want to watch the wreck they’re making from terra firma (*Att.* 27.2.7).⁹

6. Horace, *Odes and Epodes*.

7. Livy, *History of Rome, Volume VI: Books 23–25* (trans. Frank Gardner Moore; LCL, 355; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940).

8. Cicero, *De republica* (trans. Clinton W. Keyes; LCL, 213; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928).

9. Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum* (ed. and trans. D.R. Shackleton Bailey; LCL, 7; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). Cf. *Fam.* 9.15.3 (Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiars, Volume I: Letters 1–113* [ed. and trans. D.R. Shackleton Bailey; LCL, 205; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001]).

Later, Pliny describes Trajan as a competent pilot who guides the ship of state to harbor.¹⁰ So in Latin literature the ship as a metaphor for the state functions in very much the same way as it does in Greek. The ship is employed as a metaphor for the community in peril, and the emphasis is consistently on the need for strong leadership at the helm. The state, like a ship, is in constant peril, and the survival of the ship depends on an able pilot and a crew that follows his lead.

The Boat in Jewish Literature

The best example of the boat as a metaphor for a corporate body in Jewish literature¹¹ is found in the *Testament of Naphtali*:

I saw our father, Jacob, standing by the sea at Jamnia and we, his sons, were with him. And behold a ship came sailing past full of dried fish, without sailor or pilot. Inscribed on it was 'The Ship of Jacob'. So our father said to us, 'Get into the boat'. As we boarded it, a violent tempest arose, a great windstorm, and our father, who had been holding us on course, was snatched away from us. After being tossed by the storm, the boat was filled with water and carried along on the waves until it broke apart. Joseph escaped in a light boat while we were scattered about on ten planks; Levi and Judah were on the same one. Thus we were all dispersed, even to the outer limits. Levi, putting on sack cloth, prayed to the Lord on behalf of us. When the storm ceased, the ship

10. In a recent article, Warren Carter describes how Pliny's *Panegyricus* employs the image of the ship in praise of Trajan. Carter attempts to demonstrate anti-imperial sentiments in the account of Paul's shipwreck in Acts 27. Warren Carter, 'Aquatic Display: Navigating the Roman Imperial World in Acts 27', *NTS* 62 (2016), pp. 79-96.

11. The provenance of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* is complicated and is touched on below. Recent scholarship has moved in the direction of seeing the text as a Christian text, but see Joel Marcus, 'The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and the *Didascalia Apostolorum*: A Common Jewish Christian Milieu?', *JTS* 61 (2010), pp. 596-626; and David DeSilva, 'The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs as Witnesses to Pre-Christian Judaism: A Re-Assessment', *JSP* 23 (2013), pp. 21-68.

reached the land, as though at peace. Then Jacob, our father, approached, and we all rejoiced with one accord (*T. Naph.* 6.1b-10).¹²

In this text, the nation of Israel is represented by the ship that was broken apart but will one day be restored. The significance of this text for our study is that Israel is represented collectively by the ship. The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* has, however, been somewhat notorious for the difficulties involved in establishing its date and provenance. Proposed dates for the writing of the *Testaments* range from the third century BCE through the second century CE. The issue is complicated by the suggestion of many scholars that the *Testaments* contain a number of Christian interpolations. With the *Testament of Naphtali*, however, we are in a somewhat better position because this testament has been preserved in a fragment from Qumran and in two seemingly independent recensions, one in Greek and the other in Hebrew.¹³ The earliest witness to the text is the Qumran text (4Q215 or 4QTNaph). Based on paleographic evidence, this text has been dated to around the turn of the era (30 BCE to 20 CE).¹⁴ Unfortunately for our purposes, the portion of the text that refers to the ship of Jacob is not found in the fragment from Qumran. This complicates the possibility of confidently describing the provenance of this portion of the *Testament*. A look at two other available versions of the *Testament* is therefore needed—the Greek version of the text and the version preserved by Rabbi Moses. The critical edition of the Greek version was published by R.H. Charles in 1908¹⁵ and provides the text for Kee's translation.¹⁶ The later Hebrew version of the *Testament* is included by an eleventh-century Rabbi known as Moses the Preacher of Narbonne in his *Midrash Beresit*

12. H.C. Kee, 'Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (Second Century B.C.)', in James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. I. Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983), pp. 775-828 (813).

13. In fact, the text has been preserved also in Armenian and Slavonic as well, but both of these are translations, apparently from the Greek text. For a full discussion, see Kee, 'Testaments', pp. 775-77.

14. Michael E. Stone, 'Testament of Naphtali', *JJS* 47 (1996), pp. 311-21 (314). Stone cites a private conversation with Frank Cross.

15. R.H. Charles, *The Greek Versions of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908).

16. Kee, 'Testaments'.

rabbati.¹⁷ A full discussion of the relationship between these two texts is beyond the scope of this project, but recent scholarship has shown that Rabbi Moses preserves a version of the text that was based on a Hebrew *Vorlage* rather than being based on a Greek text, as was assumed earlier. For my purposes, it is enough to say that both the Greek text and the later Hebrew text include a reference to the ship of Jacob. In both cases the ship is used as a metaphor for all of Israel, which is threatened by a storm.

Here the boat stands in for the nation as it does in Greco-Roman literature. As in other literature, calamity is represented by shipwreck. It also serves as a symbol of Israel's judgment and eschatological reconciliation. Another nautical symbol from Jewish literature that was associated with judgment and reconciliation is the ark of Noah.

The Ark of Noah in Jewish and Christian Literature

Noah's ark is perhaps more relevant for the development of the boat as a symbol for the Church. In Jewish literature, Noah and his ark came to symbolize impending judgment. In Ezek. 14.14 we find Noah as a warning of impending judgment. Here Noah, along with Daniel and Job, is put forward as an example of someone who was spared because of his righteousness. In the Wisdom of Solomon, the ark is used as symbol of salvation: 'wisdom again saved it, steering the righteous man by a paltry piece of wood' (10.4 NRS). By the Second Temple period, the flood and Noah's ark were increasingly seen as symbols of judgment, and Noah's story was a reoccurring theme in Jewish apocalyptic literature.¹⁸

In Christian literature, the ark of Noah was a symbol of impending judgment and salvation.¹⁹ In Mt. 24.38 and Lk. 17.27, the coming judgment

17. The Hebrew text is available in Rabbi Moses, מדרש בראשית רבתי: נוסד על, ספרו של ר' משה הדרשן [*Midrash Bereshit Rabbati*] (trans. Chanoch Albeck; Jerusalem: Mekitse Nirdamim, 1967).

18. See Daniel R. Streett, 'As It was in the Days of Noah: The Prophets' Typological Interpretation of Noah's Flood', *CTR* 5 (2007), pp. 33-51.

19. Fuller discussion of the importance of Noah's ark for early Christian theology can be found in H.S. Benjamins, 'Noah, the Ark, and the Flood in Early Christian Theology: The Ship of the Church in the Making', in Florentino García Martínez and Gerard P. Luttikhuisen (eds.), *Interpretations of the Flood* (TBN, 1; Boston: Brill, 1990), pp. 134-49; and Jean Danielou, *Primitive Christian Symbols* (trans. Donald Attwater; Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1963), pp. 58-70.

is compared to the days of Noah. In these parallel passages, the story of Noah serves to illustrate how judgment can catch the judged off guard. In Heb. 11.7, Noah is an example of faithfulness because he trusted the warning of God and ‘built an ark to save his household’. In 2 Pet. 2.5, Noah’s generation is again invoked as an example of God’s willingness to judge sinners. In 1 Pet. 3.20, we find a somewhat more difficult mention of Noah and his ark. This passage, more than any other in the New Testament, employs the flood and the ark as symbols of God’s deliverance. In this passage, however, the emphasis falls on the waters of the flood more than on the ark itself. Noah’s generation is again mentioned as objects of judgment, and Noah and his family were saved ‘through water’. Logically, we might say that Noah and his family were saved in the ark or from the water, rather than through the water, but the point of the passage is to draw a parallel between the salvation of Noah and the salvation that comes through baptism. Although some have seen in this passage the first example of the ark itself being used as a symbol of the Church, the point is salvation through water. So the references to Noah and his ark in the New Testament itself do not explicitly connect the ark with the Church.

In early Christian literature outside of the New Testament, however, Noah’s ark was quickly associated with the cross and then with the Church. In his *Dialogus cum Tryphone*, Justin takes the metaphor of the ark and applies it to the cross. He writes,

Now, Christ, the first-born of every creature, founded a new race which is regenerated by him through water and faith and wood, which held the mystery of the cross (just as the wood saved Noah and his family, when it held them safely on the waters) (*Dial.* 138).²⁰

In the work of Tertullian, we begin to see a more fully developed use of the ship as a metaphor for the Church. He concludes *De idololatria* with the following:

Amid these reefs and inlets, amid these shallows and straits of idolatry, Faith, her sails filled by the Spirit of God, navigates; safe if cautious, secure if intently watchful. But to such as are washed overboard is a deep whence is no out-swimming; to such as are run aground in

20. Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone* (trans. Thomas B. Falls; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003). See also *1 Apol.* 55 where Justin mentions the ship among other cruciform symbols.

inextricable shipwreck; to such as are engulfed in a whirlpool, where there is no breathing—even in idolatry. All waves thereof whatsoever suffocate; every eddy thereof sucks down unto Hades. Let no one say, ‘Who will so safely foreguard himself? We shall have to go out of the world!’ As if it were not as well worthwhile to go out, as to stand in the world as an idolater! Nothing can be easier than caution against idolatry, if the fear of it be our leading fear; any ‘necessity’ whatever is too trifling compared to such a peril. The reason why the Holy Spirit did, when the apostles at that time were consulting, relax the bond and yoke for us, was that we might be free to devote ourselves to the shunning of idolatry. This shall be our Law, the more fully to be administered the more ready it is to hand; (a Law) peculiar to Christians, by means whereof we are recognised and examined by heathens. This Law must be set before such as approach unto the Faith, and inculcated on such as are entering it; that, in approaching, they may deliberate; observing it, may persevere; not observing it, may renounce their name. We will see to it, if, after the type of the Ark, there shall be in the Church raven, kite, dog, and serpent. At all events, an idolater is not found in the type of the Ark: no animal has been fashioned to represent an idolater. Let not that be in the Church which was not in the Ark (*Idol. 24*).²¹

Perhaps most significantly for our study, in his treatise on baptism, Tertullian makes a direct link between the disciples’ boat and the Church in a discussion of the story of Jesus calming the storm:

But that little ship did present a figure of the Church, in that she is disquieted ‘in the sea’, that is, in the world, ‘by the wave’ that is, by persecutions and temptations; the Lord through patience, sleeping as it were, until, roused in their last extremities by the prayers of the saints, He checks the world, and restores tranquility to His own (*Bapt. 12*).²²

Modern readers of the Gospels have also found the boat symbolizing the Church in these passages. A classic example is that of Günther Bornkamm’s ‘The Stilling of the Storm in Matthew’, in which he argues that Matthew in

21. Tertullian, *De idololatria*, in Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and Arthur Cleveland Coxe (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 3 (trans. S. Thelwall; Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885), p. 77.

22. Tertullian, *De baptismo*, in Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and Arthur Cleveland Coxe (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 3 (trans. S. Thelwall; Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885), p. 669.

particular develops the story of the stilling of the storm ‘with reference to discipleship, and that means with reference to the little ship of the Church’.²³

In later literature the boat was increasingly seen as a symbol for the Church, and in the Gospels the boat was frequently associated with the Church in the reading of pre-modern Christian interpreters of the New Testament. While the earliest available commentaries on these passages naturally post-date the writing and reception of Luke’s Gospel, they at least demonstrate that the suggestion that a pre-modern audience might be expected to make this connection is not at all unreasonable. When combined with the strong evidence we have seen in Greco-Roman literature for understanding the boat as a symbol for the collective fate of a community (in particular the boat in peril—an image not at all foreign to the Gospels), the evidence book-ends the publication of the Gospel of Luke, and makes it likely that the model audience which the texts develop readily connects the boat to the Church.

Preaching from the Boat in Matthew, Mark and Luke

In this section I will discuss the narratives of Jesus preaching from the boat as found in the other Synoptic Gospels. This will allow us to see the significance of the narrative context into which this event is placed and explore how the inclusion of the miracle of the catch casts a new light on the image.

The accounts of Jesus preaching to a gathered crowd from the deck of the boat found in Mt. 13.1-2 and Mk 4.1 have an obvious relationship to Lk. 5.1-11. Matthew and Mark are quite similar in their telling, while Luke’s version differs significantly. In all three passages, Jesus, pressed by the crowds, uses a waiting boat as a pulpit from which to preach. The similarities end here, however. In Matthew and Mark, the content of Jesus’ preaching is given, while in Luke 5, we are only told that the crowd had come to hear the ‘word of God’ (5.1). In fact, what is shared between Luke and the other Synoptic Gospels is less narrative than setting. But what does the inclusion of this setting from the Jesus tradition mean for our reading of Luke 5? I will argue that the setting found in Matthew and Mark is the more traditional and that by moving this setting to the commissioning scene Luke’s Gospel challenges the

23. Günther Bornkamm, ‘The Stilling of the Storm in Matthew’, in Günther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth and Heinz J. Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (trans. Percy Scott; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), pp. 52-57 (55).

audience to reconsider the place of the relationship of the Christian community and those outside.

It is possible that the setting is brought to Luke 5 simply to allow Jesus to both preach to the crowds and be present for the catch. If, however, the boat serves to represent the Church in all three versions, then Luke's assigning this setting to the call of the first disciples and the miracle of the great catch gives that image a different shade of meaning.

Commentators, both modern and ancient, have identified in both Mark and Matthew's versions of Jesus preaching from the boat an emphasis on the gulf that separates those inside the Church who hear and understand and those who remain outside and are kept from inside information about the meaning of Jesus' teaching. Luke's version of the story, through the inclusion of the miracle of the great catch, softens the distinction between inside and out. Not only does Jesus' proclamation of the gospel from the deck of Peter's boat help to shape the meaning of the metaphor of people-fishing, but the image of drawing in the catch, which is present in the metaphor and enacted in the miracle, helps to soften the distinction between those in the boat and those outside. The fundamental orientation of those in the boat is turned outward.

In Mark, Jesus requests in 3.9 that his disciples prepare a boat from which he might speak. The disciples are asked by Jesus to prepare a boat 'because of the crowds so that they would not crush him'. Immediately afterward Jesus ascends the mountain to appoint the twelve and then goes back to the house where he again teaches a crowd. It is not until 4.1 that the prepared boat is put to use. Here Jesus is again by the sea and a great crowd has gathered to hear and see him. Matthew omits the earlier request of Jesus to make a boat available, but in both Matthew and Mark the story of Jesus teaching from the deck follows immediately after Jesus' dismissal of his mother and brothers and his establishment of a new family based upon those who do the will of the Father (Mk 3.31-34; Mt. 12.46-50). Thus the narrative is introduced into a situation in which some are kept out while others are brought in. Further, in both Matthew and Mark, Jesus begins his teaching from the boat with the Parable of the Sower. In both Gospels, this parable is followed by Jesus' private explanation to his disciples of its meaning. The way in which Jesus accomplishes this explanation is not perfectly clear in either narrative. In Matthew it seems that Jesus' disciples are in the boat with him, and in Mark the explanation of the parable could be read as an interruption in narrative time, in which the author explains what will happen later—as though Jesus explained the parable to the disciples at some later but unspecified time. In both

accounts, Jesus' disciples ask for the reason for teaching in parables and his answer emphasizes the difference between the crowd and the disciples. In Mark, Jesus gives his description of the purpose of the parables:

When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, 'To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that "they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven"' (Mk 4.10-12 NRSV).

Matthew's somewhat expanded version further emphasizes the distinction:

He answered, 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. The reason I speak to them in parables is that "seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand". With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: "You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn—and I would heal them". But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it' (Mt. 13.11-17 NRSV).

In the case of Mark and Matthew, the literary context of the story emphasizes the disciples' status as insiders while the crowd is left out.

Ernest Best suggests that the boat be consistently read as a symbol for the Church in the Gospel of Mark. In support of this position he writes,

If we put together the references from the redaction and from the tradition we see; (i) the ship is the means of conveyance. (ii) It appears regularly in miracle contexts, moving Jesus to and from them and providing the place where they are discussed (8.14); only at 4.1 is there no direct or indirect relation to miracles. (iii) The occupants of the ship whenever they are explicitly named are always Jesus and the disciples, and usually where they are not named this is implied in the context; neither the crowd nor Jesus's enemies are ever in the ship. In addition to these

general points there are two clearly redaction passages in which the ship is related to teaching: in 4.1 it is the pulpit from which Jesus addresses the crowd; in 8.14 it is the setting for private instruction of the disciples. In 8.14 and 3.9 its purpose is to separate Jesus from the crowd; this is probably also its significance in 4.10-12.²⁴

It is perhaps not surprising that neither the crowds nor the enemies should ever be in the boat, and the frequency of miracles in the Gospel of Mark might render the connection to miracle stories less significant. Nevertheless, these factors do make the boat an attractive option as a symbol for the Church. Best's last point (that the boat stories emphasize the separation of the disciples from the crowds) is shared by other scholars. Tim Woodroof builds on this association of the boat with the Church in Mark. He notes that the boat plays a significant role in the story only in 4.1–8.21 and that in this section 'the boat provides the primary organizing motif for Jesus's travel and work'.²⁵ In this section the boat marks a private space for the disciples to receive instruction from Jesus. Woodruff describes the importance of the boat in this way:

It is in this context that the shift from Galilee and a general audience (1.14–3.35) to the boat and the disciples (4.1–8.21) becomes significant. For if (in the context of Mark's narrative) the reader is intended to see Galilee as a setting in which many will hear but few will listen, the boat, by contrast is a setting in which those who do listen and respond are gathered together with Jesus. Galilee, representing the subset of all possible hearers of Jesus's message, is contrasted with the boat, representing the subset of those who hear and obey. As we will see, the disciples 'in the boat' with Jesus are sharply distinguished from those 'on the outside'. All of this prepares the reader to understand that the

24. Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (JSOTSup, 4; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), p. 231.

25. Timothy J. Woodroof, 'Church as Boat in Mark: Building a Seaworthy Church', *ResQ* 39 (1997), pp. 231-49 (233). This organization around the boat and sea crossings is noted by other scholars of Mark as well: Norman Petersen, 'The Composition of Mark 4:1–8:26', *HTR* 73 (1980), pp. 185-217; Robert P. Meye, *Jesus and the Twelve: Discipleship and Revelation in Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), pp. 63-73.

boat is more than a mode of transportation; it is a metaphor for the disciples who leave and follow.²⁶

Woodruff goes on to attempt to unpack the symbolism of the boat in the Gospel of Mark. He concludes that one major function of the boat is to set the disciples apart with Jesus. He describes it as

a place for communion between Jesus and his true followers, as a boundary distinguishing those who have been given the 'secret' from those 'on the outside'. Never are representatives of the crowd or members of the religious establishment in the boat with Jesus. The boat is for those who are called and are willing to share the ministry and the sufferings of their Lord.²⁷

In the Gospel of Mark, the boat serves as a symbol of the Church set apart from the crowds.

Ulrich Luz finds a similar function for the boat in Matthew. In connection with Jesus teaching from the boat in Matthew 13, he writes that '[i]n the Gospel of Matthew the ship always implies a certain distance from the crowds',²⁸ and cites 14.13 and 15.39, in which Jesus and the disciples escape from the crowds by boat, as other examples in Matthew. R.T. France outlines this emphasis on separation and the role that the boat plays:

Jesus has just spoken of the special privilege of his disciples, to be regarded as his true family, and this discourse will underline that privilege. It is they, and not the crowds 'outside', who have been given the ability to perceive the hidden truths of the kingdom of heaven (v. 11), and their privilege will be underlined in vv. 16-17 ... In this introductory scene, the boat already serves that purpose: Matthew does not mention here that the disciples were in the boat with Jesus, but their private approach to him in v. 10 indicates that they were ... The boat forms a convenient pulpit in view of the pressing crowd, but it also serves symbolically to distance Jesus (and his disciples) from the crowd (who, like Jesus's family in 12.46 are 'standing' separate from the disciple group),

26. Woodruff, 'Church as Boat', p. 234.

27. Woodruff, 'Church as Boat', pp. 244-45.

28. Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), p. 233.

and thus to underline the editorial distinction between public and private teaching.²⁹

Everything about the context of Matthew 13 points to distinction. As Douglas Hare writes: ‘this emphasis on *contrast* and *separation* dictates both the substance and the structure of the discourse’.³⁰ Within this context the water surrounding the boat becomes a moat separating those on the shore from those aboard.

We can find a similar emphasis on separation in ancient commentators. In his commentary on Matthew, Hilary of Poitiers explained,

There is an underlying principle for the reason that the Lord sat in the boat and the crowd stood outside. He necessarily spoke in parables and indicates by the genre that those who are located outside of the Church can find no understanding of the divine word. The ship presents a type of the Church, within which the Word of life is situated and preached. Those who lie outside in barren and fruitless places, like the desert, cannot understand.³¹

When the relationship between Jesus, the disciples and the crowd is presented more positively, this is achieved by invoking the image of people-fishing in language more consistent with Luke than either Mark or Matthew,

He sits beside the sea in the middle of crowds and begins his discourse; and because there is not enough open space due to the over-crowding of the multitude, he gets onto a boat. Actions come about constructively when there is a need ... Since he performed many signs, he now grants them the benefit of his teaching. And he sits on the boat, fishing and entangling those on the land in his net. And this is how he sat for the Evangelist has not put this in simple terms, in order that he might describe the scene in detail (*Cat. Marc.* 301.28).³²

29. R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), p. 501.

30. Douglas R.A. Hare, *Matthew* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2009), p. 147.

31. Hilary of Poitiers, *Commentary on Matthew* (trans. D.H. Williams; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), p. 153.

32. William Lamb, *The Catena in Marcum: A Byzantine Anthology of Early Commentary on Mark* (TENTS, 6; Leiden: Brill, 2012).

In a sense, this reading is the exception that proves the rule. While it is possible that, even without the Lukan version of the story, teaching from the boat might have been heard as an enacting of Jesus' commission to be fishers of people from earlier in both Gospels, the contexts into which Matthew and Mark place the story work against it. In both Gospels, the boat most naturally functions as a marker of distance between the gathered crowds and Jesus and his disciples. The sea and the shore serve to illustrate the gap between those who see and hear and those who are kept from understanding. The crowds are depicted as those on the outside and are, at best, the soils from the parables—places where the seeds of the gospel are cast (Mk 4.1-9; Mt. 13.1-23), but the success of that casting is mixed.

In the Third Gospel, the image of a casting net (rather than casting seed) serves to illustrate that the crowds gathered are the primary goal of the mission to which Jesus will call his disciples. While the setting is the same (Jesus in the boat with the crowds on the shore), the context into which the story is placed tends to minimize this distinction, and the central emphasis of the story is the guaranteed success of the mission. If the boat is seen as a symbol for the Church in Luke, its fundamental orientation is turned outward, and those on the outside are those to be brought in.

In this section, I have argued that the boat served as a metaphor for the shared fate of a community in contemporary literature and quickly became clearly associated with the Church in early Christian literature. This allows the narrative to build on this image in the minds of the model audience. By bringing the story of Jesus preaching from the boat into the commissioning narrative, the Gospel of Luke makes its own claims about the nature of the mission to which Jesus called Peter and his companions and the nature of the Church itself. If in the Synoptic accounts the Church keeps a safe distance from those on the outside, in Luke those outside are brought into the boat in dramatic (even dangerous) fashion. The boundary between those inside the Church is made porous and all hands are called upon to labor to bring them in.

The Great Catch of Fish in John 21

This section will explore the relationship between our pericope and the final parallel passage in John 21. We will begin with the question of source. Here there is something of a consensus among scholars. This study will not

significantly advance the discussion, but a review of the literature is in order. Next I will consider the question of the meaning of the miracles within the context of John. Special attention will be given to the question of whether the miracle in John 21 should be considered an example of the people-fishing metaphor. Finally, I will explore the implication for our reading of Lk. 5.1-11, focusing on differences between the narratives.

Source

There are obvious similarities between the two miracles. On the surface, both recount a large catch of fish made possible by the direction of Jesus that follows immediately after an unsuccessful night of fishing. The settings for the two stories, however, are quite different, and there are a number of key differences that have led to speculation about how these two stories may (or may not) be related to one another. Perhaps not surprisingly, pre-modern biblical interpreters tended to see the two stories as recounting two distinct episodes in the life of Jesus. Thus, there is no question of a shared source. This is not to say, however, that early readers did not make connections between the two. Augustine, although he reads the two stories as separate incidents, finds a strong connection between the two narratives. The first catch (Lk. 5), according to Augustine, represented the Church as a *corpus mixtum*. He points out that in the Lukan passage the catch is described only as large; the nets are on the verge of breaking and the boats nearly sink. This precarious situation represented for Augustine the state of the earthly Church:

So both boats were filled, overloaded, and almost sunk. This represented Christians living bad lives, and overloading the Church with their bad morals. But all the same, the vessels were not sunk; the Church, you see, puts up with those who live bad lives. It can be overloaded, it can't be sunk (*Serm.* 242A.2).³³

The second catch (John 21) represented the true Church for Augustine:

So now, those nets which were cast previously, and caught a countless number of fish, and overloaded two boats, and the nets were breaking, and the nets weren't cast on the right-hand side; but nor did it say on

33. Augustine of Hippo, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*. III/7. *Sermons* (trans. Edmund Hill; Brooklyn: New York City Press, 1990), pp. 141–42.

the left: the mystery of this catch is already being fulfilled in this present time. But that other mystery, which he had good reason to enact after his resurrection ... So it wasn't pointless that that one took place before the passion, this one after the resurrection. There, neither to the right nor to the left, but simply cast the nets (Lk. 5.4); here, though, cast to the right (Jn 21.6). There, no number, but only a vast quantity, so that it almost sank two boats; because that too was mentioned there; while here, both number and size of the fish is mentioned. Again, there the nets were breaking, here the evangelist made it his business to say. And though they were so big, the nets were not broken (*Serm.* 252.2).³⁴

Thus, for Augustine, while the similarities invite comparison, the differences provide the interpretive key. While Augustine's extended comparison stands out, other pre-modern readers of the two stories understood them as closely related, but distinct miracles.

In critical scholarship at the end of nineteenth century, the question of the relationship between the passages moves from a chiefly theological one to a question of source. Bernard Weiss, in his *Leben Jesu*, argues that the Lukan narrative is dependent upon reminiscences of the post-resurrection appearance of Christ as narrated by John. He suggests that in Luke's source 'the narrative of the call of Peter had evidently been confused with that of his reinstatement in the office which had been conferred on him, and so the story of the miraculous draught of fishes which is connected with the one is now conjoined with the other.'³⁵ Alfred Plummer, however, was not convinced that such a confusion was probable given the differences he lists between the two passages:

1. There [John] Jesus is not recognized at first; here [Luke] He is known directly He approaches [sic]. 2. There He is on the shore; here He is in Peter's boat. 3. There Peter and John are together; here they seem to be in different boats. 4. There Peter leaves the capture of the fish to others; here he is chief actor in it. 5. There the net is not broken; here it is. 6. There the fish are caught close to the shore and brought to the shore; here they are caught in deep water and are taken into the boats. 7. There Peter rushes through the water to the Lord whom he had lately denied; here, though he had committed no such sin, he says, 'Depart from me,

34. Augustine, *The Works of Saint Augustine*, p. 131.

35. Bernhard Weiss, *The Life of Christ* (trans. M.G. Hope; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1883), p. 58.

for I am a sinful man, O Lord.’ There is nothing improbable in two miracles of a similar kind, one granted to emphasize and illustrate the call, the other the re-call of the chief Apostle.³⁶

Others have also emphasized the differences between the passages as evidence for distinct (even if related) sources. Stanley Porter allows for the possibility of a shared tradition, or even that the Lukan version was a source for the Fourth Gospel, but ultimately judges this unlikely due to ‘the lack of common linguistic elements’.³⁷ John Bailey, in his monograph *The Traditions Common to the Gospels of Luke and John*, takes the unusual position that the author of the Fourth Gospel used the Gospel of Luke as a source. In spite of this proposed dependence in other areas, however, Bailey contends that the differences between the miracles in John 21 and Luke 5 exclude literary dependence. He gives his own list of important differences:

In Luke Jesus is in the boat which catches the fish, two boats in all are involved, and the incident culminates in Jesus’ call of Peter to discipleship; in John the need for food is stressed, only one boat is mentioned, Jesus remains on shore, the fishing is concluded by a meal, above all, the whole scene constitutes a resurrection appearance. A direct relation between the two accounts, i.e. literary dependence of one on the other, is excluded by the fact that the only two significant words common to both are ἰχθύς and δίκτυον.³⁸

In contrast to those who emphasize the differences, others have pointed to the similarities. Raymond Brown, in his commentary on John, provides a thorough list:

1) The disciples have fished all night and have caught nothing. 2) Jesus tells them to put out the net(s) for a catch. 3) His directions are followed and an extraordinarily large catch of fish is made. 4) The effect on the nets is mentioned. 5) Peter is the one who reacts to the catch (John xxi mentions the Beloved Disciple, but that is clearly a Johannine addition).

36. Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1898), p. 147.

37. Stanley Porter, *John, His Gospel, and Jesus: In Pursuit of the Johannine Voice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), p. 74.

38. John A. Bailey, *The Traditions Common to the Gospels of Luke and John* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1963), p. 12. This assessment is shared by Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), p. 449.

6) Jesus is called Lord. 7) The other fishermen take part in the catch but say nothing. 8) The theme of following Jesus occurs at the end (cf. John xxi 19, 22). 9) The catch of fish symbolizes a successful Christian missionary endeavor (explicitly in Luke; implicitly in John). 10) The same words are used for getting aboard, landing, net, etc., some of which may be coincidental. The mutual use of the name ‘Simon Peter’ when he responds to the catch (Luke v 8; John xxi 7) is significant, for this is the only instance of the double name in Luke.³⁹

After noting these similarities, Brown concludes ‘that independently Luke and John have preserved variant forms of the same miracle story’, adding that ‘we say independently because there are many differences of vocabulary and detail’.⁴⁰ We see then that even when Brown emphasizes the similarities, he does not suggest literary dependence. Few, in fact, do suggest such dependence. One important exception is in the earlier work of Rudolf Bultmann. For Bultmann, Luke likely had no source for the miracle of the great catch of fish, but rather ‘[t]he miracle could have been developed out of the saying about “fishers of men”’.⁴¹ This suggestion leaves Bultmann with the problem of how the similar account made it into the Gospel of John. To address this, Bultmann suggests that ‘[t]he variant in Jn. 21¹⁻¹⁴ seems to be a later version, which in some way derives from Luke’.⁴² This assessment of the relationship was not widely received, and in his commentary on John, Bultmann moves away from this idea and suggests a shared source.⁴³ In spite of the nuances of understanding, there is widespread agreement among scholars that the sources that both evangelists use share a common ancestor.⁴⁴

39. Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), p. 1090. Brown also notes that both passages mention the Sons of Zebedee but dismisses this as insignificant.

40. Brown, *John*, p. 1090.

41. Rudolph Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (trans. John Marsh; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), p. 217.

42. Bultmann, *History*, p. 218.

43. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray, R.W.N. Hoare and J.K. Riches; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), pp. 704-706.

44. There are of course exceptions. Leon Morris concludes that the differences between the accounts are ‘too many and too great’ for the stories to be variants of the same story. He argues that the stories are based on two separate and historical events

If we assume that there is a common source behind both accounts (even if the connection lies somewhere upstream of the traditions received by the evangelists), the next question that receives considerable attention is the original setting for the story. Raymond Brown, whose commentary on John provides perhaps the most comprehensive study of these questions, concludes that the original tradition began with the fishing miracle, and that the function of that miracle was to provide an opportunity for Peter to recognize the risen Jesus. This was then followed by a scene in which Peter ‘acknowledged his sin and was restored to Jesus’ favor, and that Peter received a commission that gave him eminent authority in the community’.⁴⁵ The narrative as found in John 21, according to Brown, ‘preserved a reasonably faithful form of this story, with some admixtures of another scene’.⁴⁶ In Brown’s assessment, then, the original story was set after the resurrection and included both Peter’s confession (for his denial of Jesus) and commission.

Brown’s overall conclusion, that the tradition on which both Luke 5 and John 21 are based goes back to a resurrection appearance, is shared by a number of scholars. In fact, the majority of critical scholars who address this question suggest that the original setting of the miracle in oral tradition was a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus. This would make the Johannine setting of the miracle the more original. Those who suggest that the version of the story in Luke has been moved from its original setting argue that it retains many elements of its post-resurrection setting. These elements include: (1) Peter’s confession of sinfulness makes better sense after his denial of Jesus; (2) Simon’s use of the title *Kύριος* is not appropriate for this early point in the story; (3) The dual name ‘Simon Peter’ is common in John, but this is the only occurrence in Luke.⁴⁷ These reasons, in and of themselves, are not

(Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], p. 123).

45. Brown, *John*, p. 1092.

46. Brown, *John*, p. 1092. The other scene to which Brown refers is the meal scene in which Jesus eats bread and fish with his disciples. This is important because this division of sources separates the miracle of the catch of fish from the eating of fish later in the story.

47. The following espouse one or all of these reasons for placing the original story in a post-resurrection setting: Adolf Harnack, *Luke the Physician: The Author of the Third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles* (trans. J.R. Wilkinson; New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1907), p. 227; Burton S. Easton, *The Gospel According to St. Luke:*

compelling reasons for placing the scene in a post-resurrection setting. I would point out first of all that within the context of the fishing miracle, John 21 does not include Peter's declaration of sinfulness. Even later in the narrative, where echoes of Peter's denial are so often noted, Peter's confession is only that he loves Jesus. If this was present in the tradition, and if this fits so well into a post-resurrection account, why does the author of John 21 leave it out? Concerning the second reason, I note that there are numerous examples of characters addressing Jesus as *Kύριος* in the Third Gospel.⁴⁸ One such example follows immediately after our pericope in v. 12 when the leper refers to Jesus as Lord (*κύριε, ἐὰν θέλῃ δύνασαι με καταρτίσαι*). If a secondary character can refer to Jesus as Lord at this early stage in the Gospel, surely this is not a convincing reason for assuming a post-resurrection context.⁴⁹ Another reason for downplaying the significance of these two points is that Luke's treatment of the call has arranged the materials to correspond with a typical Old Testament motif—the commissioning story.

A Critical and Exegetical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1926), pp. 61-62; Alan Richardson, *The Miracle Stories of the Gospels* (London: SCM Press, 1941), p. 110; Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, p. 705; John Martin Creed, *The Gospel According to St Luke: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes and Indices* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1960), pp. 73-74; Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St Luke* (trans. Geoffrey Buswell; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1982), p. 43; Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium Lukas* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1966), p. 127; Leopold Sabourin, 'The Miracles of Jesus (III): Healings, Resuscitations, Nature Miracles', *BTB* 5 (1975), pp. 146-200; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), p. 563; Bailey, *Traditions*, p. 14; Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker: A Historical and Theological Study* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), p. 325. Harnack made the novel suggestion that the story formed the lost ending to the Gospel of Mark (Harnack, *Luke the Physician*, p. 227). But note that von Wahlde finds a number of aspects of the story in John 21 '[t]hat one would normally expect to have appeared much earlier in the Gospel' (Urban C. von Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John, Volume 2: The Gospel of John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], p. 885).

48. Luke 5.12; 7.6; 9.54, 61; 10.17, 40; 11.1; 12.41; 13.23; 17.37; 18.41; 19.8, 34; 22.33, 38.

49. For a more complete discussion of the meaning of *κύριος* in the Gospel of Luke, see C. Kavin Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

Benjamin Hubbard lists our pericope as an example of the commissioning story.⁵⁰ He finds this type scene in many call narratives in the Old Testament, including the calling of Gideon, Moses and Isaiah.⁵¹ According to Hubbard, the basic elements of the commissioning story are ‘1) circumstantial *introduction*, 2) *confrontation* between commissioner (usually the deity) and commissioned, 3) *reaction* to the holy presence (sometimes), 4) *commission* proper, 5) *protest* to commission (sometimes), 6) *reassurance* by deity, 7) *conclusion*’.⁵² Hubbard demonstrates that this form is common in both Luke and Acts. Further, by Luke 5, the audience has already encountered this type-scene three times in the birth narrative (1.5-25, 26-38; 2.8-20). When Peter’s response to Jesus is compared with responses from other scenes of this type, it is entirely consistent. It is similar to Isaiah’s response to the vision of the divine throne room in which he laments, ‘Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts’ (6.5 NRSV), or Gideon’s response to the realization that he had encountered the Angel of the Lord, ‘Help me, Lord GOD! For I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face’ (Judg. 6.22 NRSV). If Hubbard is correct in suggesting that Luke has crafted the narrative to fit this typical epiphanic scene, Peter’s fearful declaration of his own sinfulness and the use of the term ‘Lord’ do not point to a post-resurrection context for the story. Rather, the form casts Simon Peter in the role of the divinely appointed servant and Jesus in the role of divine messenger. While recognizing this form in the texts undermines the argument that elements are out of place for a pre-resurrection narrative, it is not possible to say whether Luke has adapted a post-resurrection story to a pre-resurrection context or John has done the opposite.

50. Our pericope is not listed in the table of Lukan commissioning accounts in the 1977 *Semeia* article (Benjamin Hubbard, ‘Commissioning Stories in Luke–Acts: A Study of Their Antecedents, Form, and Content’, *Semeia* 8 [1977], pp. 103-26), but it does appear in the table given in the 1978 essay (Benjamin Hubbard, ‘The Role of Commissioning Accounts in Acts’, in Charles H. Talbert [ed.], *Perspectives on Luke–Acts* [Danville, VA: Association of Baptist Professors of Religion, 1978], pp. 187-98 [190]). There is no reason given for the absence in the 1977 article, and the 1978 chart shows that our pericope has all the essential elements of a commissioning account.

51. For a more complete listing, see Hubbard, ‘Commissioning Stories’, p. 107.

52. Hubbard, ‘Commissioning Stories’, p. 103; emphasis original.

There are some commentators who have suggested that the Lukan chronological context is more likely. François Bovon suggests that while ‘most of the accounts in the Gospels circulated “context free” for a time’, Luke follows the tradition more closely, and Bovon finds the scene more appropriate as a revelatory scene than a post-Easter appearance.⁵³ If, in fact, the story of the great catch was passed on without context, both versions of the story would represent a fairly significant departure because the context of both is so central to the meaning of the story. If not connected with the call as in Luke or with a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus as in John, the symbolic power of both stories is lost, or at least significantly diminished. That is to say that both have been carefully placed into their contexts. This is at the very least true of Luke’s version. Even if the story of the great catch of fish was originally associated with a pre-resurrected Jesus, it is probable that placing the miracle story in the context of the call is a Lukan innovation.⁵⁴

The Meaning of the Metaphor in John 21

The final question to be considered is whether the connection between the miracle of the great catch and the metaphor of fishing for people was also a Lukan innovation. A majority of interpreters of John 21 have assumed that the miracle carries the same metaphorical payload in John as it does in Luke 5. Thus, the great catch of fish is consistently associated with those who come to faith through the preaching of the apostles. When read canonically, this is a very natural conclusion. The Third Gospel makes the connection explicit, and when encountered in the Fourth Gospel where the connection is not made clear, a similar meaning is attached. Augustine’s influential reading of both texts (outlined above) is a good example of this kind of reading.

53. François Bovon, *Luke: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (3 vols.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), I, p. 167. See also Bock, *Luke*, p. 459.

54. Bovon, however, suggests that the ‘the tradition of the catch of fish found its form-critical conclusion and punch line in the prophecy to Simon, which alludes to the metaphorical significance of the catch’ (*Luke*, I, p. 171). It seems to me that there is very little to suggest that the call should be an original conclusion to the narrative. Bovon makes more of Luke’s version of the call language, which he suggests is no longer a call but a prophecy, than the text can bear. Other aspects of the narrative have clearly been imported from independent traditions, and there is no reason to suspect otherwise in this case.

Many more recent attempts to understand the meaning of the great catch in John 21 have also assumed that it has the same significance in both Gospels. Grant Osborne argues that while ‘at first glance this pericope has no missionary thrust ... a strong missionary emphasis may be embedded in the symbolism’.⁵⁵ Osborne, however, argues that in John 21, ‘the mission thrust is not nearly so evident in this scene as it is in Luke 5’.⁵⁶ As mentioned above, Raymond Brown suggests that the miracle was originally one through which Peter recognized the risen Jesus.⁵⁷ He speculates that the symbolic significance of the catch developed only later. This symbolism is the same in both stories. He writes, ‘The symbolic meaning that developed around the catch of fish in John xxi is the same as in Luke v 10: it symbolizes the apostolic mission that will “catch men”’.⁵⁸ Although he argues that this symbolism was a development of the tradition, he suggests that this development predates both Gospels. Thus, according to Brown, the association of the catch with the missionary success of the Church was present already in both branches of the tradition which gave rise to the Johannine and Lukan forms of the story.

In Luke, the miracle was then woven into the call narrative, and in John into the story of cooking the fish on the shore with Jesus. But it is the inclusion of the meal scene in John that creates something of an awkward situation when a story about catching fish, which represent people, becomes a story about eating fish. If Luke’s account has in any way softened the negative implications of fishing for people, it seems that the story in the Gospel of John, when read in this way, highlights one of the fundamental difficulties of the metaphor. Rather than seeing this as a problem for reading the symbolism in John’s catch in this way, most interpreters have addressed the difficulty of fish who are at first symbolic of people and then the meal by suggesting that the incongruity is the result of sloppy editing.⁵⁹ Bultmann’s assessment gives

55. Grant R. Osborne, ‘John 21: A Test Case for History and Redaction in the Resurrection Narratives’, in R.T. France and David Wenham (eds.), *Gospel Perspectives, Volume II: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), pp. 293-328 (302).

56. Osborne, ‘John 21’, p. 302.

57. That the Beloved Disciple recognizes Jesus in John is, according to Brown, a Johannine innovation.

58. Brown, *John*, p. 1097.

59. A notable exception is found in Francis Moloney’s commentary, in which he writes, ‘Whatever might have been the prehistory of the account of the miracle

voice to this position when he writes, ‘So ends the story, which in the form that lies before us offers such a remarkable confusion of motifs that one can hardly say wherein the real point lies’.⁶⁰ Even when the redactor is not viewed so negatively, scholars attempt to allow the two metaphors to simply sit uncomfortably together. Alan Culpepper writes, ‘The two stories unite the preaching mission of the church in gathering new converts and the sacramental mission of the church in nourishing believers with the body of Christ and the presence of the risen Lord’.⁶¹

One reason that interpreters often associate the fish caught in John 21 with the Church is the description of the catch that John gives. The fish taken are described as 153 large fish. The specificity of the description of the fish leads most to conclude that there is some symbolic significance.⁶² The number 153 has given rise to disparate speculations going back at least to Jerome and continuing into modern critical scholarship. In a commentary on Ezek. 47.10, Jerome writes, ‘Writers on the nature and properties of animals, who have learned *Halieutica* in Latin as well as in Greek, among whom is the learned Oppianus Cilix, say there are one hundred and fifty three kinds of fishes’.⁶³ The oft noted problem with this solution is that Jerome’s stated sources do not agree with his count.⁶⁴ Ammonius suggested that the number could be

and the Easter meal, they are skillfully joined’ (Francis Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, [Collegeville, MN: The Order of St. Benedict, 1998], p. 550). Moloney is able to make this claim, however, because he does not suggest that the fish caught symbolize people.

60. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, p. 710.

61. Alan Culpepper, ‘Designs for the Church in the Imagery of John 21:1-14’, in Jörg Frey, Jan G. van der Watt, and Ruben Zimmermann (eds.), *Imagery in the Gospel of John: Terms, Forms, Themes, and Theology of Johannine Figurative Language* (WUNT, 200; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), pp. 369-402 (376).

62. Bultmann writes, ‘The more unclear the whole narrative, confused as it is through the redaction, the more certain it is that the exact statements of v. 11 have an allegorical meaning’ (*The Gospel of John*, p. 708).

63. Cited in E.C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* (London: Faber and Faber, 2nd edn, 1948), p. 554.

64. See for example Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), p. 866; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John* (2 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), II, p. 132. Talbert points this out but notes that it is of course possible that Jerome’s source(s) is lost (Charles Talbert, *Reading John:*

reached by adding together one hundred, which represented the gentiles who would come to faith, with fifty, which represented Jewish believers, and 3 for the trinity.⁶⁵ Difficulties compound with this interpretation. First, why 100 and 50 should be associated with the gentile and Jewish believers is not at all clear. Second, a reference to the trinity would be an anachronism in the Gospel of John.

Other interpreters appeal to gematria to explain the significance of the number. Gematria, in which letters are assigned numerical value and thus hidden significance, is most familiar to scholars of the New Testament from Rev. 13.18. While the significance of 666 is disputed, the suggestion that the key is gematria has been taken seriously by many biblical scholars and remains a leading explanation.⁶⁶ The suggestions for the word or phrase for which 153 stands have varied widely, and there has been no consensus among proponents of this interpretive method. Further the solutions proposed are obscure and there is no clear link to the context of John 21.⁶⁷

A third possible key for understanding the number's significance is by pointing out that 153 is a triangle number. Augustine appealed to this mathematical technique to decipher the number's significance. A triangle number is the sum of sequential whole numbers beginning at one. One-hundred and

A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles [Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005], p. 270).

65. This interpretation comes from Ammonius, *Fragments on John*, fragment 637, as quoted in Joel C. Elowsky and Thomas C. Oden (eds.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament IVb, John 11–21* (Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 2007), p. 381.

66. For an excellent summary, see David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), pp. 771-72.

67. Gematria has been used with a number of words or phrases. One of the earliest and best known looked at two place names from Ezek. 47, En-gedi and En-eglaim. The number was reached by adding the numbers in both Hebrew (J.A. Emerton, 'Gematria in John 21:11', *JTS* 11 [1960], pp. 335-36) and Greek (Peter R. Ackroyd, 'The 153 Fishes in John XXI. 11—A Further Note', *JTS* 10 [1959], p. 94). See also Paul Trudinger, 'The 153 Fishes: A Response and a Further Suggestion', *ExpT* 102 (1990), pp. 11-12. O.T. Owen suggested a connection to Mt Pishgah where Moses died ('One Hundred and Fifty Three Fishes', *ExpT* 100 [1988], pp. 53-54). N.J. McEleney suggested a unique approach that involved counting backward through the Greek alphabet ('153 Great Fishes [John 21,11]—Gematriacal Atbash', *Bib* 58 [1977], pp. 411-17).

fifty-three is the sum of 1, 2, 3, 4 etc. up to 17. To arrive at 17, Augustine proposes that 10 represents the commandments and 7 the Sabbath. This solution might be more appealing if one could demonstrate the significance of either of the symbols to the context of John 21. Nevertheless, finding significance in triangular numbers is not unheard of. Philo was fond of explaining biblical numbers through triangle numbers. *De vita Mosis* 2.77 accounts for the number of pillars in the temple (through a rather creative counting scheme) by arriving at the number 55, or 'the sum of successive numbers from one to the supremely perfect ten'.⁶⁸ In *De plantatione*, Philo explains the significance of the number four by claiming, among other things,

The number 4 is also called 'all' or 'totality' because it potentially embraces the numbers up to 10 and 10 itself. That it so embraces the numbers that come after it also. Add together 1+2+3+4, and we shall find what we wanted. For out of 1+4 we shall get 5; out of 2+4 we shall get 6; 7 out of 3+4; and (by adding three instead of two numbers together) from 1+3+4 we get 8; and again from 2+3+4 we get the number 9; and from all taken together we get 10; for 1+2+3+4 produces 10. This is why Moses said 'in the fourth year *all* the fruit shall be holy' (123-25).⁶⁹

Philo's frequent use of triangular numbers at least demonstrates that this way of interpreting texts was in use at the time of the writing and reception of the Third Gospel.

One modern reader, Matthias Rissi, who also turns to triangle numbers as key, suggests another way of getting to seventeen. He is convinced that triangle numbers were in common enough use at the time of the composition and reception of the Gospel of John to support this as a tenable solution to the problem, but he remains unconvinced by previous attempts to explain the significance of seventeen. He argues that if a solution for the problem of seventeen could be found within the Gospel of John itself, this would be a more

68. Philo, *On Abraham. On Joseph. On Moses* (trans. F.H. Colson; LCL, 289; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935).

69. Philo, *On the Unchangeableness of God. On Husbandry. Concerning Noah's Work as a Planter. On Drunkenness. On Sobriety* (trans. F.H. Colson and G.H. Whitaker; LCL, 247; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930).

satisfying answer to the riddle of 153.⁷⁰ Rissi finds this in the numbers associated with the feeding miracle in John 6 and in particular with the bread; five loaves were distributed and twelve baskets were collected after the miracle, the sum of which is, of course, seventeen. This connection is strengthened for Rissi by other connections to the feeding miracle in John 6 that are found in the meal scene of John 21. Rissi also noted that ‘es ist bezeichnend, dass in Joh. 21 das Wort vom Menschenfischen fehlt’ (‘It is significant that there is no mention of people fishing in John 21’).⁷¹ He goes on to note that interpreting the fish as people is problematic because the fish are caught for a meal.⁷² Rissi’s larger goal in the article is to suggest that the redactor of John 21 was attempting to free the Johannine community of a particular view of the Eucharist, and this contention has not been widely accepted. Nevertheless, his association of the miraculous catch in John 21 with the feeding miracle in John 6 has found a better reception, and his solution to the problem of the 153 fish at least has the advantage of referring to numbers that can be connected to the passage within the Fourth Gospel.⁷³

There are a number of clear links between the miraculous catch and the feeding miracle in John. Both are set at the Sea of Tiberias that is mentioned only in these two stories (6.1, 23; 21.1).⁷⁴ Jesus’ words in John 21.13 bear enough similarity to the early story of the distribution of bread and fish in 6.11 to connect these two accounts in the minds of an audience.

ἔλαβεν οὖν τοὺς ἄρτους ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ εὐχαριστήσας διέδωκεν τοῖς ἀνακειμένοις ὁμοίως καὶ ἐκ τῶν ὀψαρίων ὅσον ἤθελον (6.11).

70. ‘Die Auslegung der 153 als Dreieckszahl wäre nur glaubwürdig, wenn es gelänge, die Zahl 17 aus dem Kontext des Joh. Selbst sinnvoll zu erklären. Das scheint mir tatsächlich möglich zu sein’ (Matthias Rissi, ‘Voll grosser Fische, hundertdreiundfünfzig, Joh 21:1-14’, *TZ* 35 [1979], pp. 73-89 [82]).

71. Rissi, ‘Voll grosser Fische’, p. 81.

72. ‘Die Deutung der Fische auf Menschen ist aber auch fragwürdig, weil die Fische—gemäss der Auslegung der Fischzuggeschichte durch den Redaktor—für das Mahl gefangen wurden’ (Rissi, ‘Voll grosser Fische’, p. 81).

73. Mikeal Parsons connects the number 17 to 18, the ‘numerical value of the suspended form of the Name Jesus IH’ (Mikeal C. Parsons, ‘Exegesis “By the Numbers”’: Numerology and the New Testament’, *PRSt* [2008], pp. 25-43 [39]).

74. In the second occurrence (6.21), the mention of the Sea of Tiberias is explicitly tied back to the feeding miracle.

ἔρχεται Ἰησοῦς καὶ λαμβάνει τὸν ἄρτον καὶ δίδωσιν αὐτοῖς, καὶ ὀψάριον ὁμοίως (21.13).

And if Rissi's suggestion for the meaning of 153 has any merit, this is another reason to connect the narratives. These similarities are often recognized by interpreters, but the implications for the meaning of the miraculous catch are not always considered.

Rissi's observation, that there is nothing in the context of John 21 to suggest the presence of the people-fishing motif, has been echoed by other interpreters. D. Moody Smith notes that while '[i]t is sometimes thought that the fish represent the "catch" of believers or churches ... this is nowhere said in John and Jesus' command seems to consider the fish as food (v. 10).'⁷⁵ Also, Rudolf Schnackenburg asserts that '[t]he Johannine editor does not have in mind, like Luke, the missionary ministry of Peter (and the other disciples)'.⁷⁶ In comparing the Lukan narrative to the Johannine, Jerome Neyrey writes,

In both, a ritual occurs with the catch of fish. In Luke, Peter is transformed from mere fisherman to 'Fisher of People' (Lk. 5.10). In John, however, although his status as a fisherman is confirmed, better roles await him in 21.10-19 ... But the comparison also reveals important differences. The Lukan version functions both as a miracle of plenty and a commission, whereas the Johannine one is first an appearance of the absent Jesus and then a miracle symbolic of plenty—all leading to a commissioning.⁷⁷

Thomas Brodie notes that the theme of provision is present throughout John 21:

One of its most basic motifs is that of food and the providing of food. The opening section (vv. 1-6) tells of the search for fish, then of having no food at all, and finally having fish in abundance. The scene of landing (vv. 9-14) tells of finding a meal being prepared, of an invitation to eat, and then of the actual meal. Later, in Jesus's address to Peter, there is a repeated commission to provide food ('Feed my lambs ... Feed my

75. D. Moody Smith, *John* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), pp. 393-94.

76. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* (3 vols.; New York: Crossroad, 1990), III, p. 358.

77. Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 334.

little sheep' vv. 15, 17). And finally, as the beloved disciple (v. 20), there is an explicit allusion to reclining in love 'at ... supper'.⁷⁸

It seems to me that, without any knowledge of the Lukan version of the miracle of the great catch, this would be the most natural way to read John 21. The significance of the great catch in John 21 is tied to the significance of the feeding in ch. 6.

If, in fact, the miracle of the great catch in John 21 does not carry the same symbolic payload in John as it does in Luke, this opens the possibility that the tradition behind both narratives may not have already been tied to the fishers-of-men motif, and that a model audience might hear the use of the miracle in Lk. 5.1-11 as a fresh and even surprising twist on a familiar story. Other differences in the narrative offer insights into the significance of the elements of the Lukan account.

Implications for Luke 5.1-11

In this section I will explore the ways in which the two narratives diverge and press these distinctions for meaning. We cannot be certain of the state of the tradition when it may have been encountered by the author or audiences of the Gospel of Luke, but by comparing the two stories we can at least explore where the Third Gospel may have diverged from tradition. Where the stories overlap, we can be confident that these elements were part of the tradition. Where they diverge, we may be seeing the modification of either or both authors. Since this cannot be known with certainty, I will explore the differences between the stories as we have received them.

One significant difference between the two stories is the position of Jesus relative to the catch. In John 21, Jesus stands on the shore at some distance from the disciples, and the catch must be brought to him. In Luke 5, Jesus is in the boat. This detail may be a necessary result of the immediate context. In Luke, Jesus has been preaching from the boat and so naturally remains in the boat for the catch. The situation is somewhat more complicated when it comes to the Fourth Gospel. While on the surface it may seem more natural for John's Jesus to be on the shore, there is nothing about the immediate context that demands it. Jesus had already appeared to his disciples suddenly in

78. Thomas L. Brodie, *The Gospel of John: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 579.

a locked room (20.19). It would be no less natural for Jesus to appear suddenly on the boat. Jesus might also have walked out to them on the water (6.19). In fact, C.H. Dodd saw similarities between the two miracles and suggested that Jesus walking on the water in John bears the marks of a post-resurrection appearance.⁷⁹ Even if the narrative required a delay in recognizing Jesus, there was no need for Jesus to remain at a distance; the risen Jesus had gone unrecognized in John (20.11-18) and in Luke (24.13-35). So, while the traditional story may have had Jesus in either location, the scales tip slightly in the direction of having Jesus directing the disciples from the shore. The presence of Jesus in the boat in Luke's version is important because of what it means for the boat as Church metaphor. The presence of Jesus in the boat ensures success, just as his presence in the Church is the key to the success of its mission.

In Lk. 5.1-11, the near breaking of the nets, the signaling for the second boat and the near sinking of both boats all serve to emphasize the scale of the catch. There is no count as there is in John, nor is there any description of the size. To indicate scale, the narrative appeals to the audience's senses. Ancient rhetorical texts call this *ἔκφρασις*. Theon describes it in this way: 'Ecphrasis (*ekphrasis*) is descriptive language, bringing what is portrayed clearly before the sight' (Theon, *Prog.* 9).⁸⁰ The description of the near breaking of the nets, the summoning of the second boat and the near sinking of both vividly emphasize the scale of the catch. The question remains, however, whether these elements of the story serve to do more than just vivify the scale of the miracle.

If not merely to graphically illustrate the size of the catch, the summoning of the second boat may merely be an attempt to incorporate James and John into the narrative.⁸¹ In Matthew and Mark, the call narrative is split into two incidents. In the first, Peter and Andrew are called (Mk 1.18-18; Mt. 4.18-20), and in the second, James and John (Mk 1.19-20; Mt. 4.21-22). In Luke,

79. C.H. Dodd, 'The Appearances of the Risen Christ: An Essay in Form-Criticism of the Gospels', in D.E. Nineham (ed.), *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R.H. Lightfoot* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), pp. 7-35 (27).

80. George A. Kennedy (ed.), *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (WGRW, 10; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), p. 45.

81. John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20* (WBC, 34A; Dallas: Word Books, 1989), p. 223.

Andrew is absent completely,⁸² and James and John are brought into the narrative near the end and play no significant role. They are included in the call as Peter's partners (*κοινωνοί*), presumably the same partners (*μετόχοις*) who were summoned to help bring in the catch.⁸³ This connection, however, is not made explicit, and the place that they occupy in the narrative gives the impression that they were simply tacked on as an afterthought. It may be understood as a failed attempt to smoothly incorporate these characters into the story.⁸⁴ Their presence in the story would be a bit less jarring, perhaps, if they had been mentioned as the occupants of the second boat. We must choose, then, whether to read their late introduction into the narrative as the result of poor editing or as significant to the meaning of the story. We cannot know what the author intended. Bad editing and poor prose are always possibilities with real authors. If we read the text with the aim of understanding what a competent audience, those able to realize the intention of the text (model audience), encounters in the narrative, then we cannot simply chalk it up to sloppy writing. Further, to dismiss the move as a literary blunder cannot possibly produce new insights into the meaning of the text. Therefore, I will press forward assuming that an audience could recognize some significance beyond poor prose to see what fruit might come of it.

There are at least two principles of ancient rhetoric that would suggest that the text may intend more by the late introduction of James and John. The first is the principle of narrative order, and the second is the narrative virtue of conciseness.

82. Perhaps it is best not to read too much into the absence of Andrew from the story. Most likely he is not introduced into the narrative to keep the emphasis on Simon Peter.

83. Green notes that first 'Luke uses the more technical term for a "business partner"', but in verse 10 he employs a more general description, "Those who share with Simon". This alteration may be deliberate, a way of hinting that these business partners are about to undergo a change of relationship' (Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997], p. 234). Plummer suggests that the *κοινωνοί* may refer to those in Simon's boat, while *μέτοχοι* refers to those in the other boat. (Plummer, *Luke*, p. 146). Such a distinction, however, strains the differences in vocabulary.

84. Bovon writes, 'Luke takes up the sons of Zebedee as well as he can, but in a rather clumsy narrative fashion' (Bovon, *Luke*, I, p. 171).

Theon first discusses the concept of properly ordered storytelling in his discussion of fable. In describing the proper *topoi* for refuting the fable he writes, ‘We shall argue on the basis of the order when complaining that what should have been said first in the fable is not stated in the first lines and what should be in the conclusion is elsewhere; and generally in regard to each part however we can, that it is not said in the appropriate order’ (Theon, *Prog.* 4).⁸⁵ His discussion of narrative builds on the previous discussion of fable and suggests a number of different sequences in which a narrative might be told (Theon, *Prog.* 5). What we can take generally from this discussion is that elements of well-told stories should be thoughtfully arranged in appropriate sequence. Further, the text prepares the hearer for a narrative which is well ordered (Lk. 1.3). To read with the model audience, I will attempt to hear the text as it intends to be heard.

Further, according to the narrative virtue of conciseness, it would be inappropriate for Luke to include details that did not add to the rhetorical aims of the narrative. The virtue of conciseness was not a simple matter of being brief. Theon defines conciseness as ‘language signifying the most important of the facts, not adding what is not necessary nor omitting what is necessary to the subject and the style’ (Theon, *Prog.* 5).⁸⁶ Thus, conciseness demands economy of language. Theon criticizes writers who stack up synonymous adjectives or use unnecessarily lengthy euphemisms, but he urges caution ‘lest from desire for conciseness one fall into an idiosyncrasy or obscurity without realizing it’ (Theon, *Prog.* 5).⁸⁷ Good narrative has everything necessary and only what is necessary. What this means for our reading of Luke is that details matter, and when the narrative includes details, they are not incidental. Therefore, we should not expect Luke to include the reference to the second boat if it did not serve his rhetorical aims, nor should we pass lightly over the fact that Luke has delayed identifying the owners of the second boat until the end of the narrative. The effect of leaving the occupants of the second boat anonymous, however, is to invite speculation as to the significance of the boat. Throughout the history of interpretation, readers have found significance in this second boat.

Ancient commentators tended to understand the two boats as representing the Jewish and gentile churches. Ephrem the Syrian seems to read the second

85. Kennedy (ed.), *Progymnasmata*, p. 27.

86. Kennedy (ed.), *Progymnasmata*, p. 32.

87. Kennedy (ed.), *Progymnasmata*, p. 33.

boat as symbolic of the gentile mission when he writes, ‘The two boats represent the circumcised and the uncircumcised’. Augustine also saw the two boats as representing the Jewish and gentile churches. He writes, ‘Those two boats, though, stood for the two peoples, Jews and gentiles, synagogue and church, those circumcised and those uncircumcised’ (Augustine, *Serm.* 248.2).⁸⁸ Of the second ship, Bede writes,

[T]he other ship is the Church of the Gentiles, which itself also (one ship not being sufficient) is filled with chosen fishes. For the Lord knows who are His, and with Him the number is sure. And when He finds not in Judaea so many believers as he knows are destined to eternal life, He seeks as it were another ship to receive His fishes, and fills the hearts of the Gentiles also with grace of faith (Bede, *Catena Aurea*, 176).⁸⁹

Martin Luther reads the second boat in this way as well:

This draught of fishes is so great that the one boat alone (hitherto representing the church of the Jewish people) is not able to draw it up or large enough to contain it. Those in the boat must beckon to their partners in the other to come and help them. This other boat is the assembly and Church of the Gentiles which has been established and spread by the Apostles. Thus were the two boats filled with one and the same draught of fishes, that is, with one and the same sort of preaching, and with a corresponding faith and confession.⁹⁰

Others, however, see the other boat simply as other believers who would join in the mission of the apostles. Cyril of Alexandria writes,

But note that neither Simon nor his companions could draw the net to land. Speechless from fright and astonishment—for their wonder had made them mute—they beckoned to their partners, to those who shared their labors in fishing, to come and help them in securing their prey.

88. Arthur A. Just, Jr (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament. III. Luke* (Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 2003), p. 88.

89. Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels Collected out of the Works of the Fathers* (ed. and trans. by John Henry Newman; London: Saint Austin Press, 1997).

90. Martin Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther* (ed. John Nicholas Lenker; trans. John Nicholas Lenker *et al.*; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), p. 165.

For many have taken part with the holy apostles in their labors, and still do so, especially those who inquire into the meaning of what is written in the holy Gospels. Yet besides them there are also others: the pastors and teachers and rulers of the people, who are skilled in the doctrines of truth (Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Luke, Homily 12*).⁹¹

For modern commentators, the boat is also sometimes seen as an indication of two factions in early Christianity. Conzelmann detects ‘a polemical note reflecting the rivalry of two groups, one evidently gathered round Peter (and the sons of Zebedee) and another round the relatives of the Lord’.⁹² Zillesen sees in the second boat the Pauline mission to the gentiles, which received its legitimacy only through Peter.⁹³ Bovon also suggests, ‘That two boats are needed for this fishing expedition may have something to do, in Luke’s presentation, with the twofold character of the Christian church as Jewish and Gentile’. But he adds, ‘Luke does not draw any explicit allegorical parallels between the boats and the church’.⁹⁴

The breaking nets and sinking ships have been consistently seen by pre-modern interpreters as the perils the Church faced due to heresies and schisms. Bede, for example, writes,

But the fact that the ships, when filled, begin to sink, i.e. become weighted low down in the water; (for they are not sunk, but are in great danger,) the Apostle explains when he says, *In the last days perilous times shall come; men shall be lovers of their own selves, etc.* For the sinking of the ships is when men, by vicious habits, fall back into that world from which they have been elected by faith (Bede, *Catena Aurea*, 177).⁹⁵

That the boats do not, in fact, sink is seen as a testimony to the endurance of the Church in spite of these challenges. Modern commentators have tended to find less symbolism in the breaking nets and sinking ships, even when they attach some significance to the second boat.

91. Just, Jr (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, p. 88.

92. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St Luke*, p. 43.

93. Pfarrer Klasus Zillesen, ‘Das Schiff des Petrus und die Gefährten vom andern Schiff zur Exegese von Luc 5:1-11’, *ZNW* 57 (1966), pp. 137-39.

94. Bovon, *Luke*, I, pp. 171-72.

95. Aquinas, *Catena Aurea*. See also Augustine’s reading outlined above.

The description of the near breaking of nets and the near sinking of ships serves to illustrate the magnitude of the catch. If these details are meant to foreshadow some difficulty in the Church, we might expect some other clues in the narrative that pointed to such a warning. Since the thrust of the narrative points to overwhelming success rather than to impending trouble, it seems more prudent to see in these details an *ekphrastic* description of a catch that was so overwhelming as to cause Simon Peter to see Jesus in an entirely new light.

The second boat, however, is more difficult to dismiss as an addition to add color to the story. Not only does the boat appear when it is time to bring in the great catch, but there are two boats on the shore at the beginning of the pericope. It may be that commentators are correct in suggesting that the second boat represents the gentile mission. A number of aspects of the story fit well when we try on this way of reading. Jesus' presence in and teaching from Simon's boat fit nicely. The second boat is summoned only after the great catch has begun, and its occupants build on the work of the first boat. To identify the boat specifically with the gentile mission or the ministry of Paul, however, may be reading the plot of Acts too much into the Gospel. The second boat might also represent the next generation of the Church generally. In this way, the model audience is invited to see themselves as the crew of the second boat. Peter's signal is a signal to the audience to come and participate in bringing in the catch.

There is good evidence to suggest that a common tradition lies behind the two miracles of a great catch of fish narrated in Luke 5 and John 21. Although the traditions may have diverged before they were incorporated into the Gospels, there are enough similarities in the accounts to suggest that a traditional story in which Jesus leads his disciples to a great catch of fish was available and possibly been known by a model audience of Luke. The differences between the stories can help to identify special points of emphasis in Luke's account.

In John 21, the miracle points to provision and paves the way for Peter's commission to provide and care for the sheep at the end of the chapter. In Luke, the miracle represents the mission of the Church and Peter's commission to continue that effort. In both stories, one aspect of Jesus' ministry is emphasized, and Peter is called upon to lead the Church in continuing that ministry.

In John 21, the nets are unbroken, while in Luke 5 the nets are at the point of breaking. The difference is sometimes overemphasized since the nets do

not, in fact, break in Luke. While there may be some symbolism in the breaking nets—perhaps an indication of the struggles of the Church—there is nothing in the context of the Gospel that would support this reading. Rather, the straining nets serve to illustrate the size of the catch, helping the audience to experience the miracle in as vivid a way as possible.

In John 21, there is only one boat, while in Luke 5 there are two. It is difficult to say whether the second boat is a Lukan addition or whether it was added in his source. The second boat may have simply served to more closely match Mark's account of the calling. It is also possible that the two boats represent the Jewish and gentile churches. This is not entirely inconsistent with the Gospel and makes good sense if we allow Acts to be considered. I have argued, however, that the second boat may serve as an entry point for the audience to respond to Peter's signal and participate in bringing in the catch.

In the end, I am hard pressed to confidently reconstruct the source that is behind either story, but a consideration of the meaning of the miracle in John and the function of the various elements points to a better understanding of the miracle in Luke.

Conclusion

Gaining a better understanding of the traditions that shape both the story of Lk. 5.1-11 and the model audience's reception of the story enables us to become a better audience ourselves. Recognizing the symbolism of the boat in our passage only tells part of the story. When we recognize that the same symbol is already at work in the tradition, we become aware of the ways in which the text builds on and even subverts the meaning of the symbol. The symbolism of the boat has been enriched as we have tuned in to the subtle shift in meaning. As in Matthew and Mark, Luke's boat serves as a symbol for the Church. The image of the Church in Luke, however, is not an island set apart from those on the outside, but rather the intended destination of those who are pulled from the depths. The miracle of the catch shifts the emphasis of the story and focuses the Church outward. The story of the miracle, which the model audience knows in some form, is itself enriched as it is woven together with the story of Jesus' preaching from the deck. If the story was not already associated with the metaphor of people-fishing, Luke's Gospel makes that connection explicit when brought together with the call narrative.

In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, the story of Jesus teaching from the boat presents the Church as a place to be alone with Jesus, to have questions answered and be kept from the chaos of the world outside. Luke's account of Jesus preaching from the boat allows the Church this function as well—a refuge from the pressing world around. But Luke's Gospel also reminds us that this is not the Church's primary mission. The crowds on the shore become the multitude of fish that are brought into the boat. The story does not allow for the Church to remain distant from the world. The catch must be brought into the boats. The success of the mission will not result in comfort and security but will stretch communities almost to the point of breaking and strain resources to the point of near sinking. But the nets will not break, and the boats will not sink; the one that guarantees the success of the catch will also preserve the fishers.