

7 - CALLING THE FIRST DISCIPLES

After he had spent a quiet night of prayer in a deserted place near Capernaum, Luke told of Jesus leaving Galilee to proclaim his message in the synagogues of Judea. In the next phase of Luke's narrative, Jesus was back by in Capernaum once more. He had already visited in Simon's house and healed Simon's mother-in-law. Now he walked along the shore of lake of Gennesaret (an earlier name for Lake Galilee). The crowds followed and pressed in on him to hear what he had to say. Seeing some fishermen washing their nets beside their boats, he got into one and asked its owner, Simon, to put out a little from shore. There he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

After that quiet introduction picking up the theme of Jesus continuing his ministry of preaching and teaching, Luke's narrative spun into an exciting drama. Sharon Hinge calls it, "*A Fish Story.*"

Jesus instructed Simon to launch his boat into deep water and let down his nets. Did Jesus know where a school of fish could be found? Or was this one of those details Luke used to reflect Jesus' authority? The latter would seem to have been the case, because Simon immediately called Jesus *Master*. That Greek term Luke reserved for one who had authority. In similar situations in Matthew and Mark, the parallel term was either *teacher* or *rabbi*.

More important than the huge catch of fish was the addition of a second name given to Simon, *Peter*, and his reaction to the incident. The name meant *a rock* or *rocky ground*. As Luke's narrative continued, it expressed Simon's true character. Instead of a respectful response, Simon expressed fear and a desire to separate himself from Jesus. He had quickly recognized that he was in the presence of immense power and authority. In those days, unexpected demonstrations of such great power were often interpreted as demonic rather than divine. Simon's confession of his own sinfulness pointed to his belief that Jesus indeed

possessed divine powers.

Simon Peter was afraid, as had been Zechariah, Mary and the shepherds when the Angel Gabriel spoke to them. Jesus responded to this fear with the same words: "Do not be afraid." (Luke 1:13, 30; 2:10). In Luke's style this signaled that Jesus spoke with the same divine authority as had the angel. In this instance, although James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were also amazed, Jesus spoke to Simon alone. However, after bring their boats ashore, they all left everything and followed Jesus.

In those days, fishing was for food, not sport. That meant death for the fish, but life for people, especially in Capernaum, an important fishing village in Galilee. The fishermen's task in following Jesus, as Sharon Hinge puts it, was to gather people for life in a new community. This would be an entirely new trade for these men, but also for all who chose to follow him as disciples. Some who followed, like Levi (5:28), did not become apostles, but remained ordinary citizens. In Luke's time, being a Christian did mean leaving everything behind. Most of us are like Levi, disciples in ordinary walks of life.