

# The Gospel Of Luke

*16 When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, <sup>17</sup>and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:*

*<sup>18</sup>'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, <sup>19</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'<sup>20</sup>*

*And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup>Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'<sup>22</sup>(Luke 4:16-21. NRSV)*

## Message 5

### Calling The Few (Dismissing the Crowd)

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Luke 5:1-11

Rev. Paul Carter

### Introduction:

Open your Bibles to Luke 5:1-11. There are a lot of these stories in the Gospels. The Gospel writers went to great lengths to help their readers understand the difference between the CROWDS and the FEW. When you read a story in the Gospels you always want to notice whether this is a 'Jesus and the crowd' story, or a 'Jesus and the disciples' story. Jesus is always functioning on these two levels right? He'll tell a parable and he'll end by saying:

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Mark 4:9. NKJV)

The crowd HEARS the teaching but most of them don't get it. So then a little later Jesus will sit down with the few and explain things:

10 When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. <sup>11</sup>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; <sup>12</sup>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.'" (Mark 4:10-12. NRSV)

Do you hear that? Jesus says that the mystery of the kingdom is like a secret you have to press into to receive. Its veiled, its behind a cloud and you have to PRESS THROUGH that cloud to receive it. He says it is MEANT to be that way so that the lazy people, the people who don't care will be revealed by their lack of effort to understand and the true seekers of God will be revealed because they will press through the fog, they will push through the veil and they will hear, they will see, they will believe and they will be saved. Amen.

So here we have one of these crowd and disciple stories that Luke and the others use to tell us to whom belongs the kingdom of God. Let's read it:

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, <sup>2</sup>he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup>He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. <sup>4</sup>When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' <sup>5</sup>Simon answered, 'Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.' <sup>6</sup>When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. <sup>7</sup>So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. <sup>8</sup>But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!' <sup>9</sup>For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; <sup>10</sup>and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.' <sup>11</sup>When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him. (Luke 5:1-11. NRSV)

This is, as I mentioned, just one of many stories that Luke uses to show the difference between crowds and disciples and if we had more time we could study all of them or at least a bunch of them and say more of what needs to be said but we will content ourselves this morning with this story and we will develop at least an initial understanding of what separates the CROWD from the DISCIPLES.

### **Understanding The Contrast Between The Crowds and The Disciples:**

#### **1. The crowds were eager to hear, the disciples were willing to obey.**

Luke begins this story by telling us something the Gospels declare again and again: the crowds were EAGER for the teaching of Jesus. We forget this sometimes, we talk about how Jesus was all alone on the cross and we remember that he said: 'Narrow is the road and few will find it' and so we have this idea that Jesus wasn't very popular.

When I first started out in ministry I was a camp director and a youth pastor at the same time. I spent my summers up at Camp Mini-Yo-We as the Boys Camp director and we use to have this strange phenomenon called 'change over weekend'. With kids from far away whose parents sent them to camp for multiple weeks you had to look after them on the Saturday night and Sunday morning when camp wasn't really happening and the staff had their days off. So you'd end up doing all sorts of crazy things to keep these crazy kids from burning the place down. It was babysitting, pure and simple. On Sunday morning the staff gathered for church and for worship and of course the kids had to come too, or they'd burn the place down. So you'd have these kids in church with you, some of whom didn't know THING ONE about Jesus and it was just fun to watch them try to make do. We had this song we'd sing that revealed that some of these kids weren't getting it. It was called 'No One's Like You' – do you remember this song? It goes: 'Jesus, no one's like you', with a little echo thing at the end. Anyway, about three rows back there was an 8 year old boy who was obviously in church for the first time in his life and you could hear him belting it out: 'Jesus, No One Likes You, no one Likes you'. Let me tell you there were some counsellors who were very distracted in worship that day, and maybe a director or two also. This kid thought that Jesus was a loser, that he didn't have any friends and couldn't attract a crowd but that was never Jesus' problem, was it friends? No they were eager, they wanted to hear the teacher. "Tell us that one about the Pharisees being white washed tombs again Jesus!! Oh we like that one! Give us one about how the Romans are going to fall under the wrath of God Jesus! Tell us one about how the temple will fall or teach us about the End Times Jesus! Dance Rabbi dance!" Jesus was the kind of teacher that could fill a room and from time to time that became a problem. Jesus knew about the crowds, but the Bible says he would not entrust himself to them because he knew their hearts.

The crowds were eager to hear TEACHING but Jesus was looking for more; so he proposes a little test. He says to Simon 'let's go fishing'. Now you have to visualise for this to make any impact. Its obviously around noon or maybe 1:30 p.m. A lot of teaching and Rabbi talk happened during the hours of 12:00 – 3:00 p.m. because that is when it is hottest and when people generally take a break from their work and do light things with their hands and they chat and they talk about things. So Simon and the others are cleaning their nets which you had to do after each fishing trip. They had fished all through the night, which was the best time to fish. Their work day was almost done. As soon as they had those nets clean and sorted, they would head home, and CRASH. They'd sleep until 9:00 p.m. or so and then wake up and do it all over

again. Now Jesus, a Rabbi and the son of a carpenter wants to go fishing. Inside Peter is thinking: ‘Not a good time Rabbi! I’m tired, I’m spent, its HOT and the fish are not biting friend.’ But outside he says: ‘Ok Rabbi, if you’d like to have a fish, I’ll take you out for a stroll’. Peter may not have been the sharpest knife in the drawer but he had the wisdom to know that when the Rabbi speaks, you obey, even if you don’t want to, even if you think its stupid. He had the humility to know that he was the student and not the master and that means YOU OBEY.

## 2. **The crowds received teaching, the disciples received revelation.**

And so Jesus gave the crowds what they were looking for and he gave the disciples what they were positioned for. He took the disciples out beyond the gaze of the crowd and he REVEALED HIMSELF TO THEM. You see that’s what this story is about, its not about fish, its about the CREATOR OF THE FISH. Peter knew what was going on. When they began to experience the miracle PETER HAD EYES TO SEE IT and look at what he said:

he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!’ (Luke 4:8. NRSV)

This is how people in the Bible react when they find themselves in the presence of God. Isaiah said something very similar, the Bible says:

<sup>1</sup> In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His *robe* filled the temple.... <sup>5</sup> So I said:

“ Woe *is* me, for I am undone!  
Because I *am* a man of unclean lips,  
And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;  
For my eyes have seen the King,  
The LORD of hosts.” (Isaiah 6:1-5. NKJV)

The word translated as ‘undone’ actually means ‘disintegrated’. Isaiah felt himself falling apart in the presence of the Holy God because he knew there was sin inside him and the sin inside him threatened to blow him apart as it fled from the presence of God. Israel knew this same feeling. The Bible tells us in Exodus 20 that when God started speaking to them the Israelites had a panic attack and shouted out to Moses:

‘You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die.’ (Exodus 20:19. NRSV)

They had the wisdom to know that they could not survive an encounter with the Presence of God in their present state. The sin in them would FLEE from God's holiness and they would be BLOWN apart in the process.

Now notice church that Peter did not manufacture this experience. He didn't throw down his nets and FLAP ABOUT shouting: 'COME LORD GOD! FILL THIS PLACE HOLY FATHER! OPEN THE HEAVENS EL SHADDAI!' You cannot summon God like some slave or lure him in like a bird with some weird mating dance. Peter did not initiate this encounter, it came because Jesus saw something in Peter and delighted to reveal himself to those who had eyes to see. What had Jesus seen, do you remember? Obedience. You see its all connected here. The crowds wanted to hear, fine they got their story. Peter was willing to obey so he was given revelation. He didn't manufacture it, he didn't summon it by flapping about or pretending to be drunk in the spirit, he didn't jump up and down or bark like a dog, he presented himself as a candidate for the presence through obedience. And so God revealed and Peter was overcome. And Jesus had to immediately minister to Peter and say: 'Fear not'. Fear not Peter, I'm not going to blow you apart, I will not show you more than you can handle at present. A time will come for more, but for now, you've seen enough.

Peter had eyes to see and it nearly killed him. The crowds were eager for teaching and they got what they wanted.

### 3. **The crowds went home, the disciples left everything.**

The last contrast is fairly obvious, the crowds went home, the disciples left everything. After this encounter with Jesus the Bible says:

<sup>11</sup>When they had brought their boats to shore, **they left everything and followed him.** (Luke 5:11. NRSV)

This by the way is the distinctive mark of a disciple. Luke tells us a few verses later:

27 After this he went out and saw a tax-collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, 'Follow me.'<sup>28</sup> And **he got up, left everything, and followed him.** (Luke 5:27-28. NRSV)

This has always been the test of faith my friends, it is not whether you find Jesus compelling, it is not whether you find the teaching of God to be lovely, wise or effective, faith has ALWAYS been proved in just such a way. How did Abraham, the father of faith show that his FAITH was real?

Through total obedience, abandonment and the willingness to FORSAKE IT ALL. God told Abraham to go to a mountain and sacrifice his son, his only son whom he loved and Abraham WENT. That's not an entertaining teaching, that's not an amusing WORD that's a revelation and it nearly shattered Abraham. But the Bible says he pressed through the shattering and he OBEYED, he literally put it all on the altar and the Bible says:

<sup>10</sup>Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. <sup>11</sup>But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' <sup>12</sup>He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.' (Genesis 22:10-12. NRSV)

'STOP ABRAHAM! You have proven your faith and no more is required. You are willing to lay it all down for me because I am your God. It is enough'. It's always been that way. The crowd WILL NEVER PAY THAT PRICE. Luke shows us what that looks like. A rich young man came to enjoy the wise teaching of Jesus. After class he engaged in a little sparring session about the law and Jesus even commended him on his wise grasp of the teaching. But then he went on to say:

'There is still one thing lacking. **Sell all that you own** and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; **then come, follow me.**' <sup>23</sup>But when he heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich. <sup>24</sup>Jesus looked at him and said, 'How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup>Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.'

<sup>26</sup> Those who heard it said, 'Then who can be saved?' <sup>27</sup>He replied, 'What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.' <sup>28</sup> **Then Peter said, 'Look, we have left our homes and followed you.'** <sup>29</sup>And he said to them, 'Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, <sup>30</sup>who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.'

<sup>31</sup> **Then he took the twelve aside and said to them,** 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. (Luke 18:22-31. NRSV)

Do you see this? The rich young ruler was part of the crowd! He came for the teaching but he was not prepared to pay the price, he was not willing to go all in, he could not forsake the things of this world to follow Jesus. He went away sad and the disciples, those who had LEFT EVERYTHING went aside with Jesus and were told the very secrets of God. The secret of the Lord is for those who fear him (Psalm 25:14), it is not for the interested, not for the seeker, not

for the curious and not for the lightly invested. It is for those who have EYES TO SEE THAT THIS IS JESUS SPEAKING and his word is God's Word. It's for those who will leave everything and follow him and it has ever been thus.

### **Transition:**

You see, the kingdom of God does not emerge out of the crowd, it is forged out of the few. A lot of people are getting excited in here because of the crowd. We averaged well over 500 people a week in FEBRUARY! That's unheard of in this town, the kingdom of God must be at hand, the Lord must be on the move! Is that what it means? I'll tell you something, from here I don't see what you see. I see a crowd. I see disciples too, I see a few who are hungry for Jesus, who are soaking up every word from the Scriptures, I see some young women EAGRE to learn the way of Jesus so that they can LIVE IT and experience the blessing, I see new converts STRAINING FORWARD into obedience and followership and I see some older disciples who are SERVING, GIVING, CHANGING and it makes me want to sing and rejoice. I see some disciples who want MORE; but mostly I see a crowd. I see a lot of people looking at their watches hoping church doesn't cut into their TV schedule or their nap time, I see husbands wondering whether this trip to church will placate their angry, nagging wives, I see young adults putting in time so that mom will feed them and I see far too many people who came to church to watch the show. They heard we run a pretty good service here. We have a great worship team and a funny man who sings and dances and says outrageous things. They are the career visitors and we are the flavour of the month. The kingdom of God does not descend on such as these.

Now I'm not angry at the crowd, I'm really not, but I've learned something from Jesus and it is that sometimes the crowd gets in the way of the work that needs to be done among the few. Jesus can often be found dismissing the crowd in the Gospels so that he can get down to business. Sometimes he does it very politely but usually he does it by bringing offence. In John's Gospel when the crowds started to swell and obscure his work among the few who truly had eyes to see, Jesus let loose a bomb shell of a sermon, it was like nothing you've ever heard in here believe you me. He intentionally chose the most offensive language possible to make his point that day:

<sup>53</sup>So Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. <sup>54</sup>Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the

last day; <sup>55</sup>for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. <sup>56</sup>Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.... <sup>59</sup>He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

60 When many of his disciples heard it, they said, 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?' <sup>61</sup>But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, '**Does this offend you?**' <sup>62</sup>Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? <sup>63</sup>It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. <sup>64</sup>But among you there are some who do not believe.'... 66 Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. <sup>67</sup>So Jesus asked the twelve, '**Do you also wish to go away?**' <sup>68</sup>Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. <sup>69</sup>We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.' (John 6:53-68. NRSV)

When Jesus wanted to thin out the crowd so that he could focus on the few he brought out the HEAVY truths. He didn't send anyone away he just laid it all on the table. Let's go to the most offensive stuff and see whether you are entertained. Are you not entertained? Do you wish to go away? The few replied: 'Where else could we go? Only you have the words of eternal life'.

By the same Spirit that was in Jesus I am filled with the conviction that it is time to dismiss the crowd. Husbands, I release you from the obligation to come to church with your wives. Wives I put before you the plain teaching of Scripture:

<sup>3</sup>The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. <sup>4</sup>For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. <sup>5</sup>Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (1 Corinthians 7:3-5. NRSV)

Husbands, your wives will treat you generously and kindly regardless of whether you come to church with her or she is no Christian, you have my word on that. If you don't want to be here, you are under no obligation to be here. Likewise let me dismiss those who came for the show. If this is not your church, if you came here to see the worship team or to hear the strange young man yell and scream and make funny, please go back where you came from. Now, I'm not 'kicking you out', please save the paper on your offended letter telling me how horrified you are that you have been kicked out. If you want to commit to obedience, if you want to commit to this community, if you want to become part of this FOLLOWING FAMILY than by all means stay; you are welcome. You will be assigned chores, like any other family member and you will be expected to obey the house rules like any other family member, but if you are willing to pay that price than by all means please stay. But if you are just a career visitor, checking out the flavour of the month, please move on. You are eating food that was meant for the children. Does that offend you?

## **Conclusion:**

In a few minutes we are going to take communion and I'm going to do something very dangerous. I am going to pray what we used to call the prayer of consecration. It is a prayer where you pray that these simple elements, the bread and the wine would be **AS THE REAL BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST**; that they would be **AS THE PRESENCE OF ALMIGHTY GOD**. That's a dangerous prayer, because if God grants that prayer, if we take into the centre of our being the presence of a Holy God while we are harbouring sin and resentment and bitterness and disobedience than woe is me, woe is us for we are undone. The Bible warns of this very thing:

27 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup>Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup>For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgement against themselves. <sup>30</sup>For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. <sup>31</sup>But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged. <sup>32</sup>But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:27-32. NRSV)

I don't want to be condemned along with the world and I do not want to be reckoned as one of the crowd. I want to be a disciple. I want more than teaching in this place, I want to have more than my ears tickled I want to have **MY EYES OPENED** that I may see the glory of the Lord fall on this place. I want to be taken aside with Jesus so that I may know the secret of the Lord. So to the crowd I say: you are released. We love you and we welcome you, if you want to take communion today as a pledge of allegiance, as a statement that you will leave it all behind and follow Jesus then **COME**, let me serve you, let my hand pass you the bread and let my hand pass you the cup. But if you aren't in that place than let the plate pass, the let the cup pass and avoid eating and drinking judgement upon yourself.

As the elders gather at the front; Yawan, will you come and help us prepare our hearts for a meeting with the Lord?