

BOOKENDS

Dr. Paul E. McCracken
Jerusalem Institute for Biblical Exploration

As Jesus began his independent ministry in the Galilee, one of his first actions was to call together a group of people. He had met a few of them while working with John the Baptizer and Mark 1:16-20 gives the outline of this call to discipleship. The fifth chapter of Luke has a fuller version of this event:

Once while Jesus was standing beside the Lake of Gennesaret...he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fisherman had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from shore...he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that the nets were beginning to break. ...But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" ...Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." (Luke 5:1-10; selected verses)

Scholars now know the place where this event happened. It is a small inlet in the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee known as the Cove of Parables. The name is given because it was in this same cove that Jesus taught from the boat to get away from the press of the crowd (Mark 4:1-9). Scholars are sure that it was in this place that the call to the disciples was given because of a geologic feature. There are seven springs just off the shoreline that poured warm water into the lake. This warm water attracted the fish into this area so it was a natural gathering place for fishermen. Also, there are forty-two coves around the Sea of Galilee and each village used only those that were allocated to them. Fishermen from Magdala did not drop their nets in the coves that belonged to Tiberias or to Gennesaret. Only fishermen from Capernaum; such as Andrew, Simon Peter, James, and John used the Cove of Parables.

Much of Jesus' ministry took place in this area. Capernaum is nearby as are the traditional site of the feeding of the five thousand and the Eremos Heights, or the "lonely (or deserted) place" where Jesus would go to pray by himself. The Wadi Hamam, or Valley of the Doves, is close to this cove also. This wadi was the opening in the mountains around the Sea of Galilee through which people would travel to the area of Nazareth and Cana. It was also near this cove that the most detailed account of a post-resurrection experience took place.

The twenty first chapter of John's Gospel is the well-known story of Jesus serving breakfast to his disciples beside the Sea of Galilee. It includes the familiar exchange between Jesus and Peter: the thrice repeated, "Peter, do you love me?" and the response of "Yes, Lord. You know I love you." There is, in addition, a great deal of powerful information that John gives us in this chapter, and it's hidden just below the surface.

Although our English translations record Jesus asking Peter the same question three times, that is not at all correct. We don't know the Aramaic or Hebrew used in the original conversation, but one must assume that John correctly translated the idioms and context into the Greek in which he

wrote his Gospel. The Greek language has more than one word that is translated as the English word “love”. The two words used in this conversation are “*phileos*” and “*agape*”. “*Phileos*” refers to the love between friends and family or between husband and wife. It is a reflexive love that occurs because of the way that one feels about another individual. This connotation carries over into our own usage: We don’t “step into love”; we “fall in love”. It is not a choice but a reaction or a feeling.

“*Agape*” is another matter altogether. This is a love based on a conscious choice in which an individual chooses to love another. It is a love that comes more from the mind than the heart. It is a selfless love that does not need to be reciprocated in order to be maintained. It was this love to which Jesus referred when he asked Peter the first question. Allow here the use of a paraphrased conversation in which *phileos* is loving with all your heart and *agape* is loving with all your mind.

Jesus: Peter, do you love me with all your mind?

Peter: Yes, Lord; I love you with all my heart.

Jesus: Yes, Peter; but do you love me with all your mind?

Peter: Yes, Lord; I love you with all my heart.

It was at this point when Jesus changes his question. “Peter, do you love me with all your heart?” “Lord, that’s what I’ve been saying.” Jesus had twice asked Peter the question while referring to *agape*. Peter had replied using *phileos*. Peter had been answering a different question from that which Jesus had been asking. The third time Jesus asked, he used *phileos* and Peter replied in kind. However, instead of condemning his disciple for his inability to reach the highest degree of love, Jesus came down to Peter’s level and affirmed and accepted his love where Peter was able to give it. It is one of God’s great blessings that he meets us where we are, just as Jesus did for Peter.

There is another interesting component of this final chapter in the Book of John. When the disciple first saw Jesus standing on the side of the lake they did not know who it was. “*He (Jesus) said to them, ‘Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some (fish). So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. (The disciple John) said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’*” (John 21:6-7)

Why would Jesus “repeat” a miracle? Some scholars have thought that this event only happened once but Luke and John placed it at different points in Jesus’ ministry. There may be, however, a reason that this miracle was in fact performed twice.

The disciples were not sophisticated men. They lived in Galilee, which was far from the grandeur and glory of Jerusalem. While in the holy city, they had experienced a supernatural event that had left them frightened and confused. Now they were back home in the familiar surroundings that they had known all their life. It is understandable, perhaps even inevitable, that they would question whether the Resurrection had actually occurred. Simon Peter does the

natural thing when one has returned home; he went back to the only life he had ever known. “*I am going fishing.*” (John 21:3a)

Perhaps Jesus repeated a miracle, one that had occurred in the very beginning of the ministry in Galilee, to let the disciples know that he really was alive again. John’s reaction is immediate: “*It is the Lord!*” The events in Jerusalem had been real. The Teacher they had followed up to his arrest was truly alive. Now they knew for sure.