

Title: “When Fish Ignore the Hook”

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Mark 1:14-20

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Exegetical: In this narrative, Mark records the calling of Simon, Andrew, James, and John by Jesus as he began his ministry. After Jesus' baptism, John was imprisoned, and Jesus began his ministry. From the shores of the Sea of Galilee he called Simon and his brother Andrew from their vocation as fishermen and then did the same to James and John. All four abandoned their current life to follow Jesus.

Focus: Jesus calls us to be fishers of men.

Function: That my hearers may be fishers of men by praying for unbelievers, even when those prayers seem to go unanswered.

Malady: After months or years of seemingly unanswered prayers for unconverted friends or family members, we sometimes begin to doubt the effectiveness of ourselves as fishermen.

Means: (Christus Vicar) Jesus gives his life as the answer to all prayers, through all time, by God's people. He is the fulfillment of what people have prayed for and for what God has promised for centuries and now we are to be His answer to His prayer to God to send workers into harvest, to send fishermen out to the sea, Christians out to the deadly waters to pray for those who are lost.

The connection to the text is by narrowing the definition of what Jesus meant when he said, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men” and focusing on prayer, specifically “prayer fatigue” as it relates to praying for the conversion of a nonbeliever.

The major metaphor will be fishermen doing what they are called to do with confidence and faith and patience that they have been called out to the sea to save unbelievers.

Structure: Kerygmatic. Four Pages

Introduction

Main Idea: It is hard to be a successful fisherman when the fish ignore your hook.

Method of development: Image

Experience: Deductive

Trouble Text

Main Idea: Apostles / Israel waited for centuries for their prayers to be answered.

Method of development: Image

Experience: Inductive

Trouble World

Main Idea: We wait for our prayers to be answered

Method of development: Narration

Experience: Inductive

Gospel Text

Main Idea: Jesus is God's answer to His people's prayers. He calls them to be fishers of men.

Method of development: Image

Experience: Inductive

Gospel World

Main Idea: Jesus is our answer and calls us to be fishers of men

Method of development: Narration

Experience: Inductive

Conclusion

Main Idea: Trust in the mater fisher of men

Method of development: Explanation

Experience: Deductive

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

There is a very simple truism when it comes to fishing: It's impossible to be successful when the fish ignore your hook. You can have the best boat, all decked out with technology that will locate every moving thing beneath the waves. You can be in the perfect spot, where fish are bumping into each other. You can have the perfect knowledge about fishing; the perfect pole and reel for this type of prey, the proper weight for the line, and even the bait that these fish will fight for. But it all comes to naught if the fish ignore your hook. You simply cannot be successful.

You start out in the early hours of the morning, excited and full of hope. You have done your research; you have talked to all of the fishing experts and you know exactly what needs to be done. Over and over, you have replayed this moment in your mind. Every step has been thoroughly imagined - from the moment you drop your line into the water until only a minute later when you reel in your first catch. This is what success looks like and it is *so easy*! You are excited. You are ready. You are going fishing.

<pause>

Of course, after several hours of *absolutely nothing* you have not only lost your excitement, but you are at risk of losing your patience. This is when the realization begins to creep in. This is when the doubt begins to make its way into your mind. This is when the questions begin to appear.

Are you even a fisherman if you can't catch fish? You see, you can't be successful if the fish ignore your hook. And you can't be a fisherman if you can't catch fish.

Now, this might be a bit humorous and even inconsequential since we are talking about fish, but what happens if we replace the metaphor with something real? What happens if the fish are loved ones who have rejected or walked away from Christ? And what happens if your bait are your prayers? What happens if you have been praying for these unbelievers for months or even *years* and your prayers seem to go unanswered?

Simon, Andrew, James, and John were fishermen and probably successful ones at that. The fish rarely ignored their nets; the men called, and the fish answered. It was as simple as that. But what about their prayers? They were part of the nation of Israel and were waiting for their Messiah. God promised that he would come through Abraham, through the line of David. Paul would write about this later in a letter to the Galatians:

¹⁶ The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed,"^[a] meaning one person, who is Christ. (Galatians 3:16)

What of *those promises? Those fish?* How long would these four men have to wait? How long would Israel have to wait? They had waited centuries. Was that long enough? Was that too long? At what point should they pack up their fishing gear and find a new promise to wait for? At what point do they give up and reel it in because God is just ignoring their hook?

<pause>

We have the same struggles today. There was once a young man, a teen, really who had grown up in a family of devote Christians. Every Sunday morning, without exception, the whole family, every one of them would attend the church service. And not just the service but the fellowship that followed. And not just the fellowship but the serving events that the church hosted. The parents loved God and knew that God loved them. And they would constantly impress that on their children. This teen was no exception. He loved God, too. He wasn't passionate like his parents, but he had the head knowledge and a hint of that passion and that's really all you can expect from a teen. So, it was quite a shock when, just after turning 18 and moving out of the house, he stopped going to church. He didn't fade away: attending every Sunday, then a few Sundays each month, and then only once a month. He just.... Stopped. The Sunday before he moved out was the last Sunday, he stepped foot into a church.

Now, you can imagine the pain his parents were experiencing. They spoke to him, pleaded with him, but to no avail. There was just nothing that they could do to persuade him to attend church. And what was most frustrating for them was his reason. He simply stopped believing in God. It was as simple as that, he said. He couldn't point to a specific event or a specific time when he stopped believing; one day he realized that he had just.... stopped. And so, his parents did what you would expect. They got into their boat, baited their hook with unceasing prayers, and waited for God to bring them their fish. Days turned into weeks turned into months turned into years. They stayed in that boat, constantly ensuring that their hook was never without a prayer. But the fish, their son, just ignored it. Their prayers continued to go unanswered. How long would they have to endure?

<pause>

Back on the Sea of Galilee things suddenly changed one day.

¹⁶ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." ¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him.

¹⁹ When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

They wouldn't fully understand it yet, but God had answered their prayers and his answer was calling out to them. Standing in their midst was the fulfillment of what their people, the nation of Israel had prayed for. Standing in the midst was the fulfillment of what God had promised in the

Garden of Eden. His promise became flesh and his promise dwelt among us. But he didn't come as a fish; he came as a fisher of men - *the fisher of men* and through his death and resurrection he would save his people from the waters of eternal damnation. He would pull *his* fish out of the water and transform them into fishers of men.

This is so overwhelming; so unbelievable. They saw a God who found that his fish were ignoring his hook but instead of destroying them, instead of transforming the lake into a lake of hell and fire, he *became a fish like us*, and he took the punishment for us. And then through his resurrection he transformed these fish into fishermen - just like him. But he didn't stop there. He made us the answer to *his* prayer to God. He prayed:

"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (Matthew 9:37-38)

And we became the answer to that prayer. We are these workers, we are these fishers, we are the ones Christ sends out into the waters to seek and find his lost.

<pause>

That teen boy grew up to be a man and that man eventually married and had children. Until the day each of his parents died, they never gave up hope, never stopped praying. They had confidence in their God and in their God's timing and they knew that he would one day lead their son back to him. They never saw it, but shortly after they passed, he began attending church. He won't admit it to many, but he attributes his return to the perseverance of his parents. They never believed that truism and they always held out hope that Jesus would be a successful fisherman even if their fish ignored him.

And so, today, if you find yourself in the boat with a rejected hook. If you find yourself tiring of prayer, frustrated because it seems that God is just not listening, today's passage is for you. "Come. Follow me. And I will make you fishers of men." It may not look like you are successful but trust in the one who is the master fisher of men. Believe in the call. Do not lose hope but instead place it in the one who caught you.

Let us pray...

Lord,

We know someone who has turned from you; we know someone who has never met you. Lord, we pray for them today. We pray without losing hope, without losing confidence, without losing trust that you are the great fisherman. We thank you for transforming us into fishers of men and inviting us into your work. In your name we pray. Amen.