

# “Fishers of Men”

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20 July 2008

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**Note: This was presented to the men’s group at FPC, on our inaugural meeting and boat trip.**

Well here we are, on our men’s boat trip. It really is beautiful out here today out here on the water. You know, many cultures have been influenced by the sea, and illustrations using it are common in ours. For example, we talk about someone strong being a “lighthouse in a storm,” if we want many opinions on a subject, we may “cast a wide net,” and we ask for “calm waters” when times are troubling. This was true in the time of Jesus as well. One of the clever plays on words is when Jesus is calling the disciples Simon and Andrew, who were fishermen. As recorded almost identically in the three synoptic gospels, Jesus says the famous: “I will make you Fishers of Men” Here is the scripture from Mark 1, starting at verse 14;

14After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”

16As 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 make you fishers of men.” 18At once they left their nets and followed him.

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

“Fishers of Men” is an interesting analogy, because when fish are caught, they usually don’t fare so well. Although I think Jesus meant to use an interesting play on words, the idea of being gutted and cooked doesn’t sound a lot like salvation to me! Even if it is “catch and Release,” I’m not a big fan of being dragged around by a spike pulled through my jaw.

So what does this analogy mean? Maybe it pertains to growing the church. There are definitely admirable goals in growing the church. However, we start to run into trouble when we translate the phrase as a call for a membership drive – like a fraternity increases its membership through rush drives where the fishermen are the rush chairmen! Or even worse, it may degrade into something akin to a pyramid marketing scheme – where you try to get as many people into your company, or net, or church as possible. And if its about church membership, how do you avoid the competition between churches for members? Sooner or later get into a discussion – or debate – over various tenants of your beliefs and which are better than someone else’s. As two churches within a

denomination compete for members, they may debate about who's minister is better, or who's choir is better, or who has the longer sermon, or the shorter sermon; who serves the best communion and who's guest trumpet soloist is better, and so on.

So the church membership interpretation clearly has issues and limitations. So what can we do to save this analogy, and more importantly understand something about us – the men of the church?

I think that there is a very applicable message in Jesus' words here. He was inviting people to see a vision, and to share a common set of values. Not to join a club, but to join a movement of compassion against oppressive tyranny, and the exclusivity and class system of society and the church. Here is my view of how the scripture applies – as viewed by the fisherman.

First, there are all types of fishermen. There are fly fishers, deep sea fishers, commercial fishermen, Alaskan fishermen, fresh water, salt water, live bait, lures, nets, lines, etc. Just like there are all types of people. Some are leaders, some followers, some old, some younger. Some from big families, some from small. Some are more well off, some much less. But we are all still together, and share a lot. We share the fishing. And we share more. *Fishermen are all different, yet all the same.*

Second, a fisherman knows the value of food. Whether it is a worm, some cheese, a cigar minnow, a hunk of meat (if fishing for a shark) – they know that everything has basic needs. For “fishers of men” these needs reflect more than food, but shelter, companionship, purpose, self value, and many other things. We, as the fishermen, can and do share these with others. *Fishermen are charitable.*

Third, a fisherman is in tune with the conditions of the sea. He doesn't take the Jon boat out when seas are 8– 10 feet. And he is in tune with the world, and the environment. The fisherman knows that nature is filled with death, harsh conditions, and suffering. But we also know that it is filled with beauty and splendor and love too. We know when society isn't operating responsibly, or when social injustices are occurring, and works to fix them. *Fishermen know right from wrong.*

Fourth, the fisherman knows that the world is always changing. He has seen changes in the fishing hot spots, he doesn't use the same bait, or rod, or reel, boat, lake, fishing partner, line, lures, depth, and so on as he always used in the past. And he adapts! We realize that we see God through human eyes – human eyes that see through lenses of society and upbringing and our own past. We know that we can't just string together our dogma based on out-of-context snippets of translations of translations of ANY document, be it secular or sacred. *Fishermen adapt to the changing world.*

Finally, the fisherman fishes! He works, improves his skills, learns, talks, eats, drinks, and shares his thoughts. We see God in all these aspects of his life, the fishing, learning, talking, eating, drinking, sharing, and so on – not just in our fancy churches and Sunday

morning rituals. All you have to do is open your eyes and your heart to see it!  
*Fishermen live their lives and see God in all aspects of them.*

So, men of FPC, those are my thoughts on the “fishers of men” scripture. You see, we all share those five principles.

*We are all different, yet all the same.*

*We are charitable.*

*We know right from wrong.*

*We adapt to the changing world.*

*We live our lives and see God in them.*

And if we concentrate on those principles of the fisherman, then no matter how you look at it, our nets will be full!

Questions – discussion – thoughts?