

I do like fishing, but it's not easy. Sure it looks easy, as you sit here, enjoying God's great creation—but if you actually want to catch fish . . . well, that's another story. You cast out and slowly reel it back in. And when you pull up the hook with nothing but the worm, or perhaps a lure, on it, then you have to cast it out again. And again. And again. And again. This can go on for hours. I heard about a woman who cast out the line once, and when nothing bit, just gave up, declared that she wasn't any good at fishing and went shopping. Imagine! If you give up after the first cast, well, I'm here to tell you, you won't get any fish. I don't think I've ever been out fishing and had a fish bite the first time I cast.

Fishing takes patience.

Fishing takes perseverance.

Fishing take time.

Fishing takes a certain amount of skill, of course.

You do have to know what bait to use—sure worms are an all-round popular bait. But if you want really big walleye, for example, well, you're gonna need a minnow. And you want rising trout—especially in the summer? Then put away the worms and get out the insects. There's nothin' like a grasshopper, skipping realistically across the surface of the water to attract a bea-u-tiful trout.

For some fish, fly fishing is best. For others, the standard rod and reel does the trick.

But then there are there's fishing with nets—the only way for the best hall. And some even require traps, like crab and lobster. Yes, indeed. Fishing requires a lot of different techniques and different strategies. But one thing common to them all—persistence. I can guarantee your results if you only try once or twice—you won't have enough for a simple breakfast. And how I do love fresh fish for breakfast.

mmm, mmm,

I heard about a group called 'The Fisherman's Fellowship'. They were surrounded by streams and lakes full of hungry fish. They met regularly to discuss the call to fish, and the thrill of catching fish. They got excited about fishing!!

Someone suggested that they needed a philosophy of fishing, so they carefully defined and redefined fishing, and the purpose of fishing.

They developed fishing strategies and tactics. They even came up with a logo for their fishing vests. No kidding!

Then they realized that they had been going at it backwards. They had approached fishing from the point of view of the fisherman, and not from the

point of view of the fish. How do fish view the world? How does the fisherman appear to the fish? What do fish eat, and when? These are all good things to know. Absolutely. You can't catch a fish if you don't know what the fish needs and how the fish acts. Let's face it, you HAVE to go to the fish. They don't just jump in your house just because you built a house.

So they began research studies, this Fisherman's Fellowship, and they attended conferences on fishing. Some travelled to faraway places to study different kinds of fish, with different habits. Some got PhD's in fishology. But no one had yet gone fishing.

So a committee was formed to send out fishermen. As prospective fishing places outnumbered fishermen, the committee needed to determine priorities. A priority list of fishing places was posted on bulletin boards in all of the fellowship halls. But still, no one was fishing. A survey was launched, to find out why...

Most did not answer the survey, but from those that did, it was discovered that some felt called to study fish, a few to furnish fishing equipment, some to care for the Fisherman's Fellowship Hall, and several to go around encouraging the fisherman.

And most weren't sure they would be good at actually fishing and, what with meetings, conferences, and seminars, they just simply didn't have time to fish.

Now, Jake was a newcomer to the Fisherman's Fellowship. After one stirring meeting of the Fellowship, Jake went fishing. Imagine that! Yeah, he tried a few things, got the hang of it, and caught a choice fish.

At the next meeting, he told his story, and he was honored for his catch.

Then he was scheduled to speak at all the Fellowship chapters and tell how he did it. Now, because of all the speaking invitations and his election to the board of directors of the Fisherman's Fellowship, Jake no longer has time to go fishing.

But soon he began to feel restless and empty. He longed to feel the tug on the line once again. So he cut the speaking, he resigned from the board, and he said to a friend, "Let's go fishing." They did, just the two of them, and they caught fish.

The members of the Fisherman's Fellowship were many, the fish were plentiful, but the fishers, the actual fishers were few.

Yes, studying fishing, (laugh) as if that's how you can catch fish. Now, I'm not saying that learning about fishing, and understanding better ways to fish isn't helpful, but if you never drop a net or never cast a line, you can't ever expect to catch a fish.

You know, Jesus was quite a fisherman. On more than one occasion, he knew right where the fish were and all the fisherman had to do was drop the nets

where he said and they had more fish than the boat could hold—it's how he got the attention of some of the disciples at the start of it all—they were fisherman, you know.

One morning, after the resurrection, a group of Jesus' disciples went out fishing and had no luck—I told you that happens sometimes.

You have to have persistence to be a fisherman. You have to avoid getting discouraged. You have to keep at it, even if you don't catch anything. If you don't, well, you're not really a fisherman at all.

So the disciples, still in a bit of uncertainty—who are they now that Jesus has been crucified—and yes, resurrected, but it's not as if they are following him though the countryside listening to him teach anymore.

So the disciples went out fishing—perhaps out of nostalgia for their life before Jesus,

-perhaps because they just didn't know what to do with themselves when Jesus wasn't right there telling them what to do,

-perhaps they even thought about returning to their old life as fisherman. In any event, they had been fishing all night with no luck.

And then someone from the shore called out to put the nets down on the right side of the boat. I can't imagine they were too thrilled with that.

I wouldn't be too pleased with someone telling me "cast a little to the right, yeah, right over there." Nevertheless, they did as suggested, and the net came up so full it was a wonder the net didn't break.

Then they recognized him, this shoreline fisherman, this advice giver, none other than Jesus himself.

And their catch?

153 fish—seems an unusual number, so specific, 153 fish. Coincidentally, there were 153 known species of fish in that lake. 153—oh, you don't think it's a coincidence that they caught exactly the same number as the known species?

Me neither. More a message—if you fish the way Jesus tells you, you will catch everything.

By the time they get to shore, well the rest of them, Peter, as usual, went on ahead, swimming to shore the minute he knew it was Jesus. So by the time the rest of them get to shore, Jesus has a fire going and breakfast cooking—fresh fish, to which some of their catch is added. Is there anything better for breakfast than fresh caught fish, cooked up for breakfast? Mmm mmm

And they share this simple meal, fish and some bread.

And after the meal, Jesus asks a question of Simon Peter: "Simon, do you love me more than these?"

Notice, he's Simon—not Peter—in this moment. But after all, he had denied Jesus 3 times. And even before that, he seemingly forgot everything Jesus ever taught him—cutting off the guard's ear. Resorting to violence in violation of everything Jesus taught. So here, Jesus calls him not Peter but Simon.

"Simon, do you love me more than these?" Love=agape, selfless, godly love.

"Yes, Lord you know that I love you." Love=phileo, brotherly love.

"Feed my lambs."

"Do you love me?" Jesus asks again. And again, agape.

"Yes Lord, you know that I love you." Phileo, love like a brother.

"Tend my sheep."

A third time Jesus asks, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Love=phileo, do you love me like a brother?

This time, Peter's feelings are hurt, why doesn't Jesus believe him? "Yes, Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you." Phileo.

Three times Peter is given the opportunity to affirm his love for Jesus. Three times to claim Jesus, once for each time he denied him. Coincidence? I think not. Again, Jesus says to Peter, "Feed my sheep."

Jesus also tells him to "follow me." Tradition says that Peter did follow Jesus all the way to the cross, dying as Jesus did, crucified.

Fishers of men.

Fishers of people, we would say now. Fishers of all humanity.

He picked fishermen, and told them they would be fishers of people. Did you think that was a coincidence too? Not likely, no more than the 153 fish was a coincidence or that Peter declared his love for Jesus 3 times. No, no coincidences here. Rather lessons for us.

Why did Jesus pick fishermen and make them fishers of people? Because fisherman know about patience. Fisherman know about work. Fisherman know it is discipline and persistence that pays off.

To get fish in the boat you have to actually fish. You have to cast a line, or throw a net.

You also have to know about fish and about fishing.

That is discipleship. That combination. Knowing and acting.

And that's what the disciples did from that day on. That is what arose, an uprising of discipleship. And uprising of knowing, learning, following Jesus, and acting as Jesus told them to, caring for Jesus sheep, feeding Jesus flock.

Because THAT is how you fish for people. You don't use literal hooks and line or nets. You don't use duress or threats or control. You fish for people by caring for them. You fish for people by following Jesus. You fish for people by learning about them, the same way a fisherman learns about fish.

And then, of course, you keep fishing. That, that my fellow fishers, THAT is discipleship. Trying and trying and trying again. Never giving up.

And that is what arose in the disciples and in all those they met. An uprising of disciples following Jesus, caring for this flock and fishing for humanity. Over and over again.

Because it isn't about just casting a line once, or even once in a while. Fishing, and especially fishing for Jesus' flock (or should we call them a school?) fishing for people takes the persistence, the calmness, the endurance of a true fisherman.

So if you love Jesus, whether agape or phileo, look for ways this week that you can feed his lambs, tend his sheep, or feed his sheep.

If you want to follow Jesus and be a fisher of people, this week remember to fish, by rising up in your own discipleship. If you do that, if you fish through the night **and don't give up, Jesus will show you where to fish and fill your nets and your boat. Amen.**