



## Gone Fishin'

by Dale Fincher

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In a small fishing village in Galilee, a sign once hung. Or at least I can imagine that a sign once hung with the usual message for the neighbors: "Gone Fishin'."

While out on the sea, two brothers threw in their nets, wiping the sweat from a warm morning. The sea seemed to flow through their blood. They were experts in their field, able to mend nets in double-time, and pull in enough fish to keep the local market economy flowing.

Then a little-known man from the region walked along the edge of the fishing grounds. In the Gospel of Luke this man says, "Let down your nets for a catch." The fish-stands at the market would have been bare that day, if not for this gesture of goodwill (for they had been fishing unsuccessfully all night). The two men in the boat, Andrew and Simon, scratched their heads. They could have been asked to dive in and catch fish bare-handed and the imperative would not have been more absurd. But it

was not a matter of nets and boats but a matter of who made the statement. And as soon as obedience met the command, a miracle happened. The nets were full; the market was open.

In the account of the same event in the book of Mark, Jesus simply calls them. Scholars tell us that, though there are different accounts of the calling of these men, the accounts probably represent stages of the calling. Simon and Andrew may not have followed from the first moment. But the multiple callings build a cumulative case that Simon and Andrew were not blind followers to the ordinary village upstart. There was something different about this man who had power over their unpredictable occupation.

When Jesus calls them, he used his artistic tongue. He borrowed the idea of fishing and spins a metaphor to capture the imagination of these fishermen. "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Mark 1:17).

Though the brothers did not know what all of that entailed, they knew it was enough to follow. So they left their nets of many years and followed Jesus along the shore.

I can imagine their sign, several days later, still hung outside their door in the village: "Gone Fishin'." It was still true—but with different kinds of nets and for a different kind of fish.

The metaphor is still a strong picture for us today, even those of us who live in a world of corporations, concrete, sound-bytes, and email. A simple return to the words of Jesus and his metaphor reminds us again that one of our quests is to help fish people out of the ocean of confusion, folly, and rebellion, despite all the trappings of modernity. To someone who likes fishing, it encourages me again to take up the Master's imperative, cast my line (or my net), and see what bites.

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