



The One That Didn't Get Away

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On a recent day of fly-fishing, I approached a river known for abundance in trout but also for its "catch and release" policy. No fish may be taken from the stream. While this did not improve the possibility of putting food on my plate, it did better my chances of actually catching something.

I had been fishing for a couple of hours on that creek when the hook-up came. From under the grassy beds, a mature Rainbow Trout took my fly. The reel whined as the fish fought back. The fight was quick, but fierce. When I brought it to shore, I realize that I had forgotten my net. I would have to pull it out of the water by the line. I did so. But just when it cleared the bank, my line snapped.

Now, I've only been a fly-fisherman for a year. Because my short experience has not afforded me many decent catches, you can see that when a substantial fish bites the line I want the satisfaction of at least looking at it.

When my line snapped, the fish dropped to the grass and began to wiggle violently for the water. It was too strong, fast, and slippery to stop with my hands. So I acted impulsively: I lunged toward the water. There, head first on the bank, my arm and shoulder in the creek, I, fought the fish back, pushing him to the grass and away from the stream. I am sure my wrestling the two-pound fish beside the water looked ridiculous, but I was determined to have my prize and release him respectfully.

How satisfying it was to hold (and release) my catch!

That little scene moved like a metaphor in my mind of how Jesus calls us to be fishers of men, as he himself is a fisher of men. How God must sometimes go to wild measures to pull us from our watery worlds.

Francis Thompson found this to be true in his famous poem, "The Hound of Heaven." He ran from God, but the heavy footfall followed him. He tried to hide himself under the shadow of the moon. He tried to find favor in the eyes of the children. He tried to envelope himself in the mysteries of nature. But he found God amongst his hiding places. It was not

merely God's fingerprints that he found, but God's presence as well.

Running from God would be like a child locking her bedroom door to hide from her father, only to discover that the bedroom was built by her father—and he owns the door and the lock and the key.

The pursuing Hound of Heaven reminds Thompson, "All things betray thee who betrayest me." In other words, God says, "The things you are hiding in are mine, and thence will betray you to their Maker." The poem concludes with God's voice, "Rise, clasp My hand, and come! [...] Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest, I am He Whom thou seekest!"

God's presence and goodness are absolutely inescapable. And His persistence with people is similar to my trout experience—not only does He persistently remind us of his pursuit in Scripture, but He throws himself into human flesh to radically fish us out of sin and ultimate harm.

The apostle Paul was no stranger to God's approaches. A leader of the law, born of excellent blood, he had all he needed to follow God. But his heart did not follow until Jesus Christ appeared to

him on the road to Damascus. At that moment you could see the wriggling Paul as the most reluctant convert in the Roman Empire. Yet when Christ came to him, Paul chose to be a fish out of water.

Jesus Christ confronts each of us with the same basic question. Will you be caught? Will you follow? And while we have the freedom to keep swimming in the watery worlds of selfishness and fear, he also gives us the freedom to be caught. With God there is no "catch and release" policy. We are finally held firm in his grasp and set free in his inescapable love.

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