

## When Fisherman Fight

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**MARK 1:16-18 (NLT)** *As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup>And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” <sup>18</sup>And immediately they left their nets and followed him.*

I don't fish for a living. If I did I'd probably hate it. But I am a bass fisherman; and for me, fishing is its own reward. I can be on the water waiting for daylight in the morning, and stay until after dark that evening—not get a bite all day—get sunburned; tendonitis in my casting elbow; sore back and feet—and love every minute of it. Of course, that enjoyment is enhanced if I catch something occasionally—and the bigger the better.

Some years ago I set a standard for myself: if I ever catch a nine-pounder, it will go on the wall. I have five over eight pounds in my fishing journal; but I've not been able to break that nine-pound barrier.

The man who taught me the secrets of bass fishing had code words for everything. You can't be too careful, you know. You don't want rival fishermen to find your favorite “honey hole.” He had grown up on a farm that bordered Talala Creek, and he had fished that creek regularly as a boy.

When the dam was built and the lake was raised, Talala Creek became a major arm of the lake; but George still knew where every hole, every roadbed and every barrow ditch had been. And so the code names emerged: “Cocklebur Hole”; “Vada Point”; Strong Creek, named after the family through whose farm it ran, was “Muscle Creek”... Oh the fishing secrets we shared.

It's probably a good thing I don't fish for a living. I love it; but even knowing the secrets, I'm not all that good at it. But in our text this morning, fishing was the way Simon and Andrew made their living. There's an old saying: “Give a man a fish, and he'll eat today. Teach a man to fish and he'll feed his family from now on.”

When I was in junior hi, I had a math teacher who, I think, harbored a secret fantasy to anchor network TV news. He'd make an assignment and then, while we worked, he'd sit on his desk and editorialize about current events, rambling on for the benefit of anyone who wanted to listen.

His favorite subject was foreign aid. He'd carry on about sending seeds to those 'beggars' overseas, so they could plant crops and become self-sufficient; and they'd “eat the seeds!” Even as a eighth grader I wondered what they were supposed to eat while the seeds grew. He complained daily about sending aid to “ungrateful, primitive 'brutes' (his word), while we have starving people right here in the United States who'd appreciate it more and put it to better use!”

And there was an elder in my student church. If he said it once, he said it in

every board meeting: "The church shouldn't be sending money across the ocean as long as we've got starving people across the street!"

Remember the story in the gospel about the woman anointing Jesus' feet with expensive ointment. Some of those present said indignantly to one another, "*Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold... and the money given to the poor.*" *And they rebuked her harshly. (But Jesus said,) The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me.* (MARK 14:4-7 NIV)

The message seems to be, and—if we're honest—observation seems to confirm: this business of "taking care of things at home first" is a "smoke screen." The truth is: service to others will never get done if we put it off until "our own house is clean". When "charity begins at home," it rarely leaves home! That's why "the poor will always be with us." We know that.

Max Lucado is a wonderful story teller. One story is about a family tradition when he was growing up. Every year during spring break, the family went on a fishing trip to the mountains. They had a pickup camper, and they spent the days fishing and hiking and the evenings playing "Monopoly" and just being together.

One year, Max's mother was unable to go on the trip, so Max invited his best friend, and "the guys" headed for the mountains. Their excitement grew as the forest embraced them; the pine-scented air grew crisp and cool, and their spirits were lifted by the laughter of running streams.

They reached the mountain lake late in the afternoon, built a campfire, and made plans for the next day's fishing.

That night a late winter storm blew in, and in the morning they could hardly open the camper door against the strong winds. There'd be no fishing that day; but that was O.K., they had "Readers' Digest" and Monopoly; they'd just relax today, and fish tomorrow.

As the day drug on—three guys cramped in a tiny pickup camper—Max began to notice some personality traits, heretofore unnoticed—in his best friend: the irritating whine in his voice, an unwillingness to accept suggestions from others. And he couldn't handle constructive criticism; he became very defensive when Max mentioned the pungent odor emanating from his friend's tennis shoes, and when Max explained that he was only looking out for his father's property, he looked to his father for support, and his father ignored him.

He had never noticed how unsupportive his father was until that day; and he wondered how such an insensitive, unsupportive father could raise such a wonderful son as he. At the end of the day they crawled silently into their sleeping bags. Tomorrow would be better. It would be a great day of fishing.

The next morning they again had trouble getting the door open—this time be-

cause ice coated everything. But that was O.K., they had the rest of the week, and surely the storm would blow over by the end of the day. They could re-read the "Readers' Digest," and play "Monopoly" again.

Max continued to discover just how unpleasant his father and his best friend were. When Max offered constructive criticism to his father—about the soggy scrambled eggs, and the not-quite-done biscuits, his father was quite ungracious, and suggested that tomorrow Max could fix his own breakfast. The day deteriorated from there, but as they crawled into their sleeping bags, again they anticipated a fine day of fishing the next day.

The next morning they awakened to the sound of sleet on the camper; and his father's first words were, "We're going home." Neither of the boys argued.

The Moral: "When fishermen aren't fishing, they fight."

Max didn't extend that; but I wonder if he would agree: "When fishermen fight; it's usually because they're not fishing"?

Jesus called his disciples with the words, "I will make you fishers of men." And when they were not fishing, they were fighting: over which one of them would be Vice President and Secretary of State on Jesus' Cabinet when he came into his kingdom.

There are many ways to catch fish—many kinds of fishing tackle—many kinds of strategies—depending upon the kind of fish you hope to catch, and the conditions in which your fishing.

In the same way, the One who calls us to be fishers of persons provides the tackle with which to do the fishing! The tackle is called "Spiritual Gifts".

But when we don't use the gifts—when we aren't fishing, that's when we have those stressful board meetings...

By contrast, all three gospels report an occasion when Jesus commissioned his disciples and sent them out. "*He gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.*" (LUKE 9:1-2 NIV)

And when they were faithful to their task, they came back and reported on their mission, they said, "*Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.*" (LUKE 10:17B NIV)

Christians are called to be fishers of men; and when they're not fishing, too often they're fighting. But when fishermen fish, sooner or later there will be fish in the frying pan; and "It just doesn't get any better than that!"