

# “Catch and Release”

*Mark 1:16-20*

**January 24, 2021**



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If you're an angler and want to pass your love of fishing onto your grandchildren's grandchildren, then it would be wise to catch and release. Likewise, I would like to argue that, if you want to pass your love of Christ onto your family, then it's not wise to catch and release, you have no other choice but to catch and release. And just to up the ante, in 2 short sentences we went from the angler passing on to generations she likely never meet, to the lover of Christ passing on to just their family. That is, the stakes are high. Let us, lovers of Christ, better understand how much we're like Volunteer Fire Fighters and 1<sup>st</sup> Century Fishermen.

I googled and found the sign outside a local fire department in Pennsylvania that Lori Wagner<sup>1</sup> write's about. It's advertising for volunteer firefighters and reads: Members Wanted, Cool Hat, Sweet Ride, No Pay, Odd Hours. 😊



While the sign concedes the volunteer nature of the job and its unpredictability, it also tries humorously to play up the "cool" aspects of being a firefighter. Who wouldn't love the idea of riding in a fire engine! Or ringing that bell!!! Or sounding that horn!!! But it's more than that. Actual members of volunteer fire stations typically love their work. For many, being a volunteer firefighter not only gives them a sense of purpose, allows them to exhibit good will toward others, and makes them feel, they are making a difference in their communities, but they also tend to be a tight communal group. They support each other and uplift each other, and the station provides a place for them to gather, communicate, and build lasting and meaningful friendships. Of course, not mentioned in the "ad" are the more dangerous aspects of the job –actually fighting fires! But for most firefighters, the benefits far outweigh the risks.

A similar sign could have been posted in Jesus' time for the job of "fisherman." Perhaps something like this: Fresh Salt Air, Strenuous Labor, Long Hours, Tedious Work, Minimal Results



While the life of a fisherman might have included beautiful sunrises and sunsets, some great camaraderie, and maybe even a free fish dinner once a week, it also was an extremely tough job that required infinite patience, a strong body and mind, and maximum endurance. The kind of net fishing that Jesus' disciples practiced required a particularly strong, muscular physique. The intensity of hauling nets in and out of the water, often filled with heavy fish of all sizes and shapes, as well as other sea creatures, was a brutal way to make a daily living. Not only that, but the linen nets were always tearing. So, mending and sewing nets was also a daily chore that had to be completed expertly and effectively. Typically, nets would be cast in the evening hours of dusk, and in the morning, the mending of nets would commence. If they were regimented and dedicated about their work, their persistence would eventually pay off. We do know that The Zebedee Family Fishing business did quite well for example, because when James and John left to follow Jesus, they left their father in the boat with "the hired men." Those who could afford a single boat, let alone to hire a crew ran one of the wealthier and more obviously dedicated and successful fishing businesses, exemplified by persistent, loyal, hard working men and women. They too would have had to work together for the good of the team in order to fish, mend, sort, clean, and sell their daily catch. It takes a team to run a profitable fishing business in a competitive regional market like the one around the Sea of Galilee.

I wonder what Peter and his brother Andrew's mothers-in-law and wives had to say about releasing them to chase an travelling preacher? I wonder how old man Zebedee felt when he released his two sons, and they left their half-mended nets in the boat.

Jesus' call to be fishers of people is not like the bulletin cover, it's not the fairy tale, fantasyland view that too much of Christianity has. It's hard work that requires as much strength as it does endurance. It requires a level of selflessness and sacrifice that is counter cultural. And, yes, Jesus will teach us to fish for people, but in order to catch them, there is so much we need to release.



I think of a man named Hans Luther. He had dreams that his illustrious son's practice of law would be the means of pulling their family up from their humble origins. Hans probably had dreams of his son standing



before kings. And Martin Luther, the reformer, did stand before kings -- but it was as an outlaw, with a bounty on his head, not as a champion of the law, but as a champion lover of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Friends, We are today's disciples, called to catch people and it is not easy because we have so much that we need to release in order to be able to catch even just our own family. There's a question that makes the point, ***"If you were arrested for fishing for your family, would you be convicted?"***

Amen?!

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<sup>1</sup> Wagner, Lori. *The Catch*. (CSS Publishing Co, Inc.).

<sup>2</sup> Flesner, Paul E. [Sermons for Sundays in Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany](#)

