

SUBMITTED BY
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ON
2014.09.26

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Keine Stimmen

Fisher of Men



When Jesus spoke, it came alive. He did not make yawning lectures with many abstract words but often used pictures. We humans love pictures. Pictures are easier to memorize. Pictures illustrate something and pictures can be remembered - especially when they have something to do with our life. And the pictures which Jesus used, had to do with his audience. Let us take the parables of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew chapter 13) as an example. A whole chapter where Jesus talks in images to the people and his disciples. There were many farmers among the audience and that is what the parables of the fourfold field are aiming at - the word which does not only fall on good soil or the image of the enemy who sows a seed which destroys the good seed. Then there were also housewives, for whom the image of the leaven is just right or then also the fishing net, which of course fits for the fishermen in this region at the so-called Galilean Sea - the Sea of Galilee.

But if we now ask ourselves which image Jesus probably used as the very first one, it seems to be not so easy at all. And if I'm going to ask it that way, it's certainly not one of the ones I just mentioned. That's true. The parable of the fishing net is the closest to our image, because it is also about fishing. Now, of course, it rings a bell with most people. It is about the incident when Jesus was passing by the Sea of Galilee and saw Peter and Andrew in the boat and called out to them, "Come, follow me. I will make you fishers of men!" An incident that is actually familiar to many of us. But I think it's worth looking at a little more closely:

Come follow me. I will make you fishers of men!

This is what Matthew 4:19 says, so this is the first image Jesus used. He sees fishermen and he brings an image that is familiar to them: fishing. Only they weren't supposed to be catching fish, they were supposed to be catching people. Actually funny, totally weird you would say. Fishing for people? How can they do that? They are fishermen, but none of them has ever done that before.

But you know, that was practically a job offer. And it was for an apprenticeship. Jesus is the teacher, these two are supposed to be his students. So they didn't have to know man-fishing yet. Jesus says: Come follow me. And he adds: I will make you fishers of men! So they were to attend a school where they could learn to fish for men.

Teachers, students and other disasters

Be a teacher, school, student? That often sounds terrible to our ears. After all, that means constant learning, and then there are the exams and certain teachers can also be hugely annoying. Yes, I know that too. But let's deal with these things a little.

Now this school is not about a primary or secondary school. No it is about a vocational school. The profession is fisher of men. The goal of this school is to be a fisher of men at the end. It's about achieving that goal. You're still in school, too. You know, this is to prepare you to learn a profession later on. At the moment you can ask yourself: What is the use of what we learn here in mathematics? But just imagine an architect (a man who plans houses) who can't calculate. Nothing would be right, the walls would be crooked, the floors as well and the worst would be: A floor could collapse just because the floor is not designed for a certain load. And all because of a few miscalculations. The consequences would be fatal.

So school is necessary to be able to learn a profession and a profession is necessary to earn a living later on, to start a family, to have an apartment or to build a house and later on in old age you also want to enjoy a little bit of pension - but this is only available if you have worked for years.

I personally also pressed the school desk for years. First I was at school for 10 years, then I tacked on an 11th year as I couldn't find an apprenticeship. 1 year of business school followed and another 3 years of business school during my apprenticeship. At the end I was trained to be allowed to sit in an office. Later I went back to school to study the bible extensively. (Here, of course, my own schooling should be mentioned.)

Fisher of men, that is the job Jesus has to offer us.

The job ad

There are job ads in newspapers and on the Internet. I brought one here once. It says what kind of job it is. Which requirements one has to fulfill and often also, what one is offered (in the apprenticeship this is still little, a small apprentice wage, later however can be ne whole quantity).

But you know it is not enough a job advertisement, like this here only to look at. No we must first react to it. For a job advertisement in the newspaper or on the Internet, this means that we must first of all contact the appropriate company. To do this, you usually write an application. You first have to express your interest in the job. It is very similar with Jesus. He also makes a job offer, but this alone is not enough. Of course, we do not have to apply for this apprenticeship first, but we also have to respond when Jesus says: Come follow me. I will make you fishers of men.

Different People's Reactions

The two men were sitting in a boat when Jesus spoke to them, casting their nets. How could the men have reacted

They could have said: A crank. We're supposed to leave our place in the boat here and follow this teacher? Nope definitely not! And they would have just kept casting their nets.

They could have also said: Wait a minute Jesus, slow down. We've got so much to do. We'll follow you later. You know, that's the kind of reaction Jesus had. He met different people:

Then a scribe approached him. "Master," he said, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "The foxes have their den, and the birds their nests; but the Son of Man has no place to rest." Another, one of his disciples, said to Jesus, "Lord, allow me to go 'home' first and see to my father's burial." But

Jesus replied, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead!" (Matthew 8:19-21)

Jesus clearly stated what it meant to be a disciple of His. He does not simply say to this scribe. Fine, you want to follow me. He was showing him the reality of what it means to go to school with Him. It also means giving up various privileges that one has under "normal" circumstances. The foxes have their den and the birds have their nests. But Jesus has no place where he can rest.

And then to the second man who said he wanted to bury his father first. You know, this father was very likely not dead yet. He actually means that he wants to receive his inheritance and then he would follow Jesus later on. That is, when his father has died and he holds his inheritance in his hands.

We too can come up with heaps of such excuses before we are ready to follow Jesus (should we then really follow him). Today you might say, Jesus, I haven't done all my homework yet. A little later you might say: Oh, I just finished my education, now I want to work a little bit and start a family. And a little while later you might say to Jesus, you wanted to enjoy your retirement a little bit. But Jesus would say to you: As important as these things may be, do not hide behind such lazy excuses. You follow me! Or as he says to this man: "Follow me and let the dead bury their dead! We do not know directly how these two men reacted. Perhaps this was left open on purpose, since we are also faced with such a decision when Jesus calls us. We need to think about what it means to follow Jesus, and we also need to set our priorities accordingly.

The reaction of Simon (Peter) and Andrew

The two men in the boat reacted quite differently. They left their boat. They took to their heels (socks didn't exist yet though) and they followed Jesus. I now claim it was definitely the right decision which they made. Likewise, ten others also followed Jesus. Some of them were also fishermen

The apprenticeship, the vocational school, the exams

Now a new phase of life begins for these two and the other ten men. They now have a teacher to guide them. And the lessons turn out to be far from boring. They quickly see that Jesus is not a normal teacher that they might remember from elementary school. No, Jesus surpasses all teachers. There were people who were amazed how he taught. At the end of one such lesson (beaten 3 chapters in the Bible) it says:

When Jesus had finished speaking, the crowds were deeply impressed by his teaching, for he did not teach them as their scribes did, but with authority. (Matthew 7:28-29)

Jesus had the most exciting input ever, much more exciting than mine here.
But not only was the teaching exciting, but also what Jesus did. He used it to show that he was more than just an ordinary man. With him, the lame could suddenly walk again, the blind could see and several thousand people (5000 men alone) were fed, even though there were only 5 loaves and 2 fish.

But as it is with a vocational school, there are also some tests. Several times the trust of the disciples in Jesus was tested. Often they failed - but sometimes they passed.

Then Jesus also sent them out occasionally, two by two, commissioning them to heal the sick and cast out evil spirits (Matthew 6:7-13). He also gave them authority to do this (otherwise it wouldn't have worked at all). And the twelve went and healed the sick, cast out demons, and called people to turn away from their evil deeds and turn to God. So the disciples were experiencing very practical lessons, not just hitting the classroom.

All in all, you can say this was an educational, exciting, hands-on lesson with Jesus. And the lessons were necessary for them to later do the job Jesus entrusted to them - fishing for people. He was preparing them for their job.

You know, one thing fascinates me about God, about Jesus. God doesn't just stick us with a piece of paper that says what all we need to do and then he leaves us with that task. No, he took three years and invested in training those twelve disciples.

This is how God does it with us. He doesn't just have an assignment ready for us and leave us to it. No he wants to be on the road with us.

And after school?

But what about after this vocational school? All right Jesus invests time in us, in our education. But what about after those three years of training? Let me tell you, He doesn't abandon us even then. The whole training is designed to teach us to trust him, and that also applies to our job as fishers of men for Jesus. There, too, we remain totally dependent on Him.

Not for nothing does Jesus say at the beginning of the "Great Commission" - when Jesus sent the disciples out into the world for the purpose of fishing for people in the future, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go ye therefore..." (Matthew 28:18-19a). Not out of our own strength, we must carry out this commission, but trusting that HIM - Jesus Christ - has been given all authority.

Jesus used another image to teach us this very fact.

I am the vine, and you are the branches. If anyone abides in me, and I abide in him, he bears abundant fruit; without me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

It is important to stay connected to Jesus even after training. Without Him we cannot bear fruit, even fishing for men is not possible without His 'being there'. Jesus lives in those who are willing to follow him, he assures us of this.

Closing thoughts

People shall be delivered from darkness and come into the light, people shall be delivered from death and find true life with him, that are the central concerns of God. He does not want even one person to be lost. That is why the job ad for his disciples reads: "Come follow me. I will make you fishers of men!" We get to participate in this most important plan God has for all people by being trained to be fishers of men and in turn win people to Jesus. These people are not drowning in the lake or river, but they are drowning in their guilt and sin if they do not experience forgiveness from God. That is why Jesus needs this picture. That's why this passage is at the beginning when he called his disciples. Then, at the end of the gospel according to Matthew, the circle closes again - where Jesus sends the disciples out into the world. And this mission ends only with the return of Jesus Christ. Until then, we are challenged, where we live, where we go to school and where we work, to win people for Jesus.

Sources

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