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## *Fishing and Patience*

**An article for the *Cathedral Times*  
by Dean Sam Candler**

Two Sundays ago, we heard John's version of how Jesus called the brothers Andrew and Simon to be his disciples. (According to the *Gospel of John*, the brothers were originally disciples of John the Baptist; see John 1:35, 40.) This past Sunday, we heard the *Gospel of Matthew's* version, in which Andrew and Simon were fishermen, and out fishing, when Jesus called them (Matthew 4:19).

I tend not to worry about the differing accounts. Be patient with them. Instead, like so many Christians through the ages, I am taken by the famous remark of Jesus to the fishermen, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people" (Matthew 4:19). I like that verse, because I like to go fishing. I have enjoyed all sorts of fishing in my life: in lakes with small reels and poles, in rivers with fly rods, in oceans with big surf gear. I have enjoyed perfecting the spreads of cast nets being tossed into salt marsh creeks. I have been thrilled by dragging heavy seine nets out beyond the waves of the surf.

When I have gone fishing, I have had no idea what I might catch: a bream here, a bass there. But also a dead limb, a rock, an old shoe. On an ocean beach, the array of possible catches is even more enormous: red drum, catfish, trout, stingray, sharks. I truly have no idea what might attach itself to my hook. Sometimes, it has been simply the thick sand, the bottom of the ocean. When that happened to me as a child, I would sing a revision of the famous spiritual, "I've Got the Whole World... In My Hands."

But we don't have to be fishermen to appreciate Jesus's line. Jesus' invitation to Andrew and Simon displayed an important gospel principle. "Jesus calls us to follow him with the same gifts and talents that we already have." When we hear the invitation to follow Jesus, we bring along what we already have potential for, what we are already good at, even what we have been trained for. But we use those gifts and talents in a different way. We use them "for people."

Follow me, says Jesus, and you won't be just fisherfolk. You will fish for the sake of the kingdom; you will fish for people. Jesus says the same thing to people skilled in the law, in administration, in encouragement, in caring, in hospitality, in business, in mothering, in fathering. "Follow me, and I will make you a lawyer for people, an administrator for people, a banker for people, a business person for the kingdom of heaven." Jesus calls each of us to use our God-given gifts for some higher purpose, for the reign of God on earth.

So, we don't have to be fisherpeople to appreciate Jesus's words here. But fishing does provide another powerful gospel illustration (and not just the principle that we end up catching all sorts of things!). Fishing teaches us patience. There have been many days when I have gone fishing with no "success" at all. I didn't catch a thing. That's why my father used to tell me, "They call it fishing, not catching." Good fishing teaches us good patience.

Fishing teaches us patience. Alan Kreider has written a careful new book, a new study of the first three hundred years of the Christian Church, titled *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*. Kreider argues there that the reason Christianity was able to grow within the Roman Empire is because Christians valued a virtue that was not so popular in Roman and Greek societies: the virtue of patience. The first three hundred years of Christianity was "a patient ferment."

Sometimes that virtue of patience seems undervalued in our present-day Christianity. We live in a culture that often

forgets it. Instead, our society values instant gratification, the fix-it-quick syndrome, the get-rich-quick scheme, the 24/7 news cycle, “on demand” movies, the 140 character tweet, the same-day delivery store.

Not many of us make our own bread any more, where we learn to wait for the dough to rise, where we learn “the patient ferment.” Not many of us can stand going fishing and catching nothing for a while. But the early Christians, in a pagan non-believing world, learned those things. They believed that the ultimate exemplar of patience was our very God. God could perfect the world in an instant, could God not? But God is patient. God has been patient for thousands, and hundreds of thousands, of years. And God is still patient: with us, with our friends, and even with our enemies. In every age, in every time, Christians learn again what it means to be patient. When we learn the virtue of patience, we are learning something of the nature of God.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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