

Fishers of Men

By Robert H. Miller, Doylestown, PA

Anyone want to go fishing? I love to fish and I have a tackle box full of lures - most of which have never caught anything - except possibly me when I bought them. It has always amazed me how a particular lure might catch fish one day and then be a total "dud" on other days when the water and weather conditions are basically the same. I guess fish are fickle - maybe like people!

While most of us "fish for fish," many years ago there was a man named Jesus who asked some fishermen who were mending their nets to "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." There was something different about this man named Jesus and they were compelled to follow him - no questions asked! I wonder how many of us would have done the same thing - or would we have thought of Jesus as some religious fanatic - or would we have come up with excuses why we couldn't stop what we were doing and follow him. But, James, John, Andrew and Peter responded to the invitation - they left their nets - and followed him - for better or worse!

Did you ever wonder if the disciples had any doubts about how they were going to fish for human souls for Jesus and his kingdom? How would they even begin? How would you? The Bible tells us that Jesus simply sent his disciples out to preach and have authority over demons. The disciples certainly had "on the job" training since they had heard Jesus preach many times and had listened as he taught the multitudes deep spiritual truths using parables - and they had personally witnessed Jesus perform many of his miracles. Their faith in this man called Jesus was all they had - but this was enough - and they went forth to "fish."

Since the fishermen in the days of Jesus used nets for the most part to catch their fish, I'm reminded of a ritual done each spring in Lambertville, NJ when a group of fishermen put out their nets in the Delaware River twice each day during the shad run. The shad migrate from the Atlantic Ocean each spring and swim up the Delaware River to spawn. As the net is slowly brought to shore, scores of people on the bank push and shove to see what the net contains. During the times I have witnessed this event, I have seen the net catch shad, trout, bass, perch, blue gill, catfish, carp, crappie, suckers, turtles, leaves and a stick or two. The net does not discriminate and catches anything and everything with which it comes in contact.

In thinking about how the net catches the "trash" fish as well as the "good" fish, I am reminded that our Lord did not ask us to discriminate when he told us to be "fishers of men!" And Jesus certainly sought all persons for his kingdom - the lowly sinners as well as the priestly. In fact, Jesus was criticized many times for spending so much time with the sinners rather than with the religious leaders. His reply was that the sick were in need of his healing, not the well.

The term, "fishers of men" has a deep meaning for me for I actually saw a beautiful example of this request by Jesus in my hometown of Woodstock, VA. My Dad taught a Men's Sunday School Class in Woodstock and the one thing I remember most was the beautiful witness this class did for their Lord as they became "fishers of men."

Woodstock is similar to Doylestown in many respects - both are small towns - both are county seats - both have courthouses - and both have those who are less fortunate than others. In

Woodstock, the "town bums" or "trash" as they were called, would sit on the benches and steps around the courthouse square and smoke, chew tobacco, drink alcohol and while away the hours and days. These men were poor and despairing and had little hope for the better things in life. On Sunday morning, sometimes the town people all dressed up in their fine church clothes on their way to church, would actually cross over to the other side of the street so they wouldn't have to get too close to the "trash" seated around the courthouse square.

The Sunday School Class did something I believe Jesus would have done if He had physically walked the streets of Woodstock. I think Jesus would have gone to the courthouse square and ministered to these persons and that is exactly what this class did. Members of the class went to each of these unfortunate persons and invited them to come to the Sunday School Class as their guest. The invitations were offered out of love, concern and doing what Jesus requested of all of us - to become "fishers of men."

An amazing thing happened which I shall never forget - many of these down and out, unwanted men went home, probably took a much needed bath and put on their best clothes - and started coming to the Sunday School Class. What is equally amazing is that some of these men became the most faithful members in the class and came back Sunday after Sunday. Why? I believe this happened because these men had been treated as human beings and not trash - with dignity, respect, compassion and love and they responded to God's love.

Trash! What a cruel term when applied to human beings. The Bible tells us that God created us in his own image and we were made just a little lower than the angels. Dignity, respect and love should never be denied another human being because of his or her misfortune. Yes, the net catches all with which it comes in contact and so does the Lord's net if we but lower it into the deep and go fishing in his name.

Anyone want to go fishing?