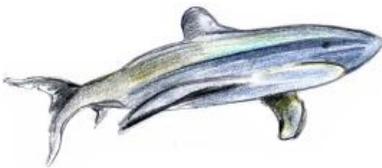


Being Spiritual Fishermen

REV. DAVID R. SIMONS

Do you like to fish? Why is fishing so much fun?

Fishing is full of surprises. You never know quite what you will catch. Maybe the fish will be so small you will toss it back, or maybe it will be too big for you to pull out of the water. I once caught a shark that was as large as I am. Sometimes you find an unusual creature on the end of your line, a treasure from the deep. My family loves to go fishing. We always set off with anticipation, guessing ahead of time what's out there in the blue water, and what we will bring home with us.



We can't decide what is the most fun. The trip out, full of exciting possibilities, or the trip back, hopefully with a boatload of fish, food for the table. We guess what might take place, and when this guess turns into what does actually happen, we are exhausted, but jubilant.

Did you ever wonder why the Lord chose fishermen to be His disciples? It is because fishermen, by the very act of fishing, are asking, seeking, as it were continually knocking on the door. Asking: "Are there any fish here? Is this a good spot to drop in my line?" Seeking for fish in deep blue waters, fishermen throw their nets into the sea again and again. They need to be patient, persistent, not give up easily. These are qualities the Lord needs in His disciples.

After the Lord was crucified and rose again, the disciples felt abandoned and confused. For three years the Lord had been their leader, and now they did not know what to do. One evening Simon Peter said, "I'm going fishing" (John 21:3). Six of the other disciples went with him in the boat. All night long the men cast their nets into the sea, but they caught nothing.

Then in the early morning they looked toward the shore and saw the Lord standing there. He asked them if they had any food, that is, any fish, and they had to say no. Then He said, "Cast your net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some" (John 21:6). When they did as He said, they caught such a multitude of fish that they could hardly drag the net ashore.

When He first called them to be disciples, the Lord had said, "I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). And He did. Instead of natural fish, they began to catch the minds and hearts of people by preaching and teaching the truth about the risen Lord. The disciples became great fishermen, drawing a multitude of people to the Lord and starting the first Christian Church.

Did you know that Emanuel Swedenborg, the man chosen by the Lord to write about His Second Coming and so bring about the New Christian Church, was also a fisherman? He called himself a "spiritual fisherman."

"I was once asked (Swedenborg tells us), how, from being a philosopher I became a theologian; and I replied, 'In the same way that fishermen were made disciples...by the Lord; and that also from early youth I had been a spiritual fisherman.' On this my questioner asked, 'What is a spiritual fisherman?' I replied, 'A fisherman in the Word...[is] a man who investigates and teaches natural truths, and afterwards spiritual truths in a rational manner'" (*The Interaction of the Soul and the Body* 20).

Swedenborg loved to investigate the world around him. He fished for answers to questions about nature, everything from rocks and soil to things of human anatomy, like the brain cells. He would ask himself questions. "Why do things happen the way they do?" "What does the Creator have in mind?" Then he would investigate to find the scientific facts, and, later, he was led to find the spiritual truths in the Lord's Word.



Answer by answer, Swedenborg discovered the things of natural science. These were like stepping stones in his mind to things in the spiritual world. He studied living things in the natural world, which provided a basis in his mind for understanding the living truths of heaven. Then he was led by the Lord to discover that the inside and outside worlds—the spiritual and the natural—were connected by correspondence.



Fish, for example, correspond to natural knowledge, the things we know about the world around us. Anything that we can say about fish is also true of what knowledge does for our minds. Scientific knowledge provides food for thought and ideas, as fish provide food for the body.

Asking questions is like our minds going fishing. It is like taking a net and throwing it into the sea, or baiting a hook and dropping it into the water hoping for a bite. Just like fishing in the natural world, this kind of fishing can be fun too.

Questions want answers. When we catch a fish we take it home, satisfied. We eat it, making it our own. So, too, our minds feed on answers, on knowledge, thus growing bigger, stronger, and more energetic.

But where we find answers depends a lot on where we look for them. The Lord told the disciples that if they wanted to catch fish they had to cast the net on the “right” side of the boat. So, too, we have to look for answers in the right places. Natural knowledges, which only look down toward earthly things, are not enough for us if we are to become the spiritual, heavenward looking beings the Lord intended us to be. We must look for answers in spiritual knowledges from the Lord’s Word.

Have you ever noticed that in the Word the Lord asks a lot of questions? For example, there is the one He asked the disciples after they had been fishing all night and caught no fish, “Children, have you any food?” (John 21:5). Why do you think He asked this when being Omniscient—All Knowing—He already knew the answer?

By asking questions of us the Lord teaches us to ask questions ourselves. And He goes further, promising that if we ask (the right questions) the answers will be given. If we seek (in the right places) we will find what we are looking for. If we knock (on the right doors) they will open to wonderful things.

There are parables in the Word which can lead to many questions:

What does the Lord mean by the Sower who went forth to sow? What does it mean to throw seed on all those different kinds of ground? Because the disciples asked, the Lord explained this parable and gave them and us the answers.

Even the Lord’s miracles are, in essence, deep questions:

Why change water to wine? Why does He do this at a wedding feast?

Why does the Lord heal the blind? How does this miracle relate to our lives?

There is no end to the questions that can lead to spiritual truth. We must learn to be persistent fishermen.

