

The Swallow and the Froth

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Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 0 0] the swallow and the froth i'm from one of the highland fishing communities my grandfather donald mcdonald was a mechanic and a fisherman my grandmother will you mind a mcdonald or lena was a herring girl and she traveled with the fishing fleet gutting the herrings when they were brought into harbor the religious piety of these highland fishing communities was very intense largely due to how many of these fishermen were lost at sea the men didn't weren't never were never sure whether they'd return to land so they made sure that they had made their peace with god none of them could swim but they could all pray the woman worked double hard often carrying their men on their backs onto their clinker boats to stop their men from getting wet for many of these fishing communities like my own the image of christ the good shepherd wasn't as immediately powerful as christ the divine fisherman christ the divine fisherman who was with them on their boats who was still in the storm of fear in their hearts and filling their nets with fish these fishing communities were often the scene of christian revivals where a new sense of spiritual urgency would grip the villages and many people would put their faith and trust in the lord jesus christ the divine fisherman in the village next to mine there stands the fisherman's hall where every sunday evening an evangelistic meeting is held alec will know this hall very well at the age of 15 i preached there for my first time in the fisherman's hall in brora over many years many people have been saved in what we all affectionately call the holly gospel songs are sung christian testimonies are given appeals are made and the word is preached the divine fisherman has used the holly to bring life to many in the village of brora and the surrounding villages one of the fishermen who used to go to the holly was a man called sanders sulland a broad-spoken broder man he had lived a rather reckless life until the day he was saved he had fallen from the side of his boat while fishing for prawns or pranies as they call them there he wasn't wearing a life jacket and none of them could swim the water filled his heavy boots and he went down into the sea he came up for air again but went down again it was at this point that one of his fellow fishermen jamesy managed to haul him from the water back onto the boat at that very moment sanders realized how close he had come to death and on the deck of that boat fell to his knees and committed his life to jesus christ as lord and savior for the rest of his life sanders became one of the most earnest evangelists in the village well jesus christ the divine fisherman who called sanders southern to follow him and who made sanders a fisher of men an evangelist who let down his nets he made him someone who let down his nets not for a cache of fish but for the souls of men jesus the divine fisherman is calling all of us here today to follow him so that he will make us fishers of men now in these verses mark one verses 16 to 20 jesus is calling his first disciples simon andrew james and

john all of them were fishermen on the sea of galilee they were hard men with rough hands from working with coarse rope and splintered wood passing by jesus said to simon and andrew follow me and i will make you become fishers of men he called them to follow him and he would change them from fishing for the souls for fishing for fish to fishing for the souls of human beings through the preaching of the gospel and we read immediately they left their nets and followed him now over these few weeks we're reviewing some of jesus great statements from the gospel of mark and today we're hearing his voice follow me and i will make you become fishers of men jesus the divine fisherman is passing by us today and he's calling us to follow him and he'll make us fishers of men he'll change the direction and purpose of our lives as we both believe and proclaim his gospel we are not a fishing community here and this is not the harley but let the power of this image of jesus as the divine fisherman fill your hearts and minds today i let his call across the waves of time and space change both the direction and purpose of your life now this saying of jesus is easily divided into two sections although we want to view them of course as intimately connected with each other we cannot follow jesus without becoming fishers of men and we cannot fish for men without following jesus so first of all follow and then fish following and fishing following first of all in the language of first century in israel the language of following belongs to how a jewish rabbi would call young men to become his disciples to accompany him on his journeys to learn from him and become his successors so we have jesus the divine rabbi calling simon and andrew to become his disciples to leave their nets behind and to accompany him on his journeys learning from him both by the things he said and did and carrying on his teaching after he's gone the root meaning of the word disciple as we have it in english is the latin word discipulus which means student students must first apply to university to study there simon and andrew didn't apply to become students in the university of the gospel rather jesus called them to become his students that's always the way of it we don't apply to become christians by filling in a host of forms and passing entrance exams christ calls us from where we are and the mess we've made of our lives he calls us to be his disciples his students to follow him the only qualifications we need are that we're sinners in need of a savior as his first disciples you'll notice that jesus didn't fish in the seas of political cultural or the social elite of israel he didn't choose princes or kings he chose humble fishermen with rough hands and strong muscles they were common men who worked hard to provide for their families and again today jesus is still calling common people calling to himself not many who are wise

rich and powerful but plenty of common people he's calling us common folk today who have nothing to offer society except our taxes and our service and he's calling us to be his disciples after all as one of my missionary friends often says to me god is more interested in our availability than our ability is he calling to you today across the seas of time and space follow me many years ago i was swimming in the sea just off savannah georgia in the distance i saw a pod of dolphins i dipped my head below the water and i could hear them talking to each other with their high-pitched squeaks and their staccato clicks now the dolphins were hundreds of yards away and yet because the sea is such a good conductor of sound i could hear them as though they were next to me jesus calls to common people today through the sea of time and space his voice entirely as powerful as though he were standing next to you which by the holy spirit he really is saying follow me follow me become my disciples accompany me through life and learn from me from the things i say and the things i do become like me and let my life course through your veins let me not your fishing nets become your first priority in life and death i don't promise you an easy life but i do promise you a life in which you'll experience joy and a satisfaction you'd never thought possible follow me jesus the divine fisherman is calling andrew and simon to follow him he's standing by the sea as they're mending their nets now the sea of galilee is roughly the same kind of size as loch lomond but by virtue of it having steeper cliffs it's more liable to rough winds and strong swells the fishermen in the sea of galilee knew all about the dangers of the waters they were fishing they'd been out on stormy nights when their wives and children were safely tucked up in their bed but for all that their lives as fishermen was risky jesus was inviting these men to follow him into an altogether more dangerous calling it's as if as if from the heart of the sea he's calling them to move into deeper waters more dangerous waters more unpredictable waters they're going to have to learn to leave behind them the safe ordered lives they led and follow jesus wherever he leads them exposing them to the same kind of fear hatred and rejection to which jesus was exposed the divine fisherman is calling them to trust him as he calls them into deeper waters to leave their boats behind and to join him on his some of us may have watched a tv program on the discovery channel called the deadliest catch which follows the fortunes of deep sea crab fishermen in the bearing straits these fishermen exposed themselves to daily risks and many of them and their boats that lost at sea jesus is calling simon and andrew james and john to a life of daily risk among the sea of humanity it's not a comfortable it's a dangerous calling and yet for all its danger it's also a life filled with joy joy and satisfaction as we trust in jesus and learn from him as his students as his disciples oh i will get our feet wet

as we follow jesus our divine fisherman in whom we trust but we'll also experience our warmth of heart we never thought possible as he continues to forgive our sins and burns the hope of eternal life in our hearts is jesus calling you today from across the sea of time and space is he calling you to follow him and become his disciple that is what a christian is a disciple a follower of jesus can you hear his voice through the waters of his word as he passes through this morning remember the only qualification you need to become a disciple of jesus is that you're a sinner in need of a savior jesus the divine fisherman has come near this morning and is calling out follow me follow me second fishing fishing 300 years ago on the day before his licensing as a minister of the gospel the scottish minister thomas boston wrote a book with a rather quaint title a soliloquy on the art of man fishing a soliloquy on the art of man fishing his passion was for proclaiming the good news of jesus christ and this little book which you could get online he talks about how he's going to go about fishing for the souls of people through the preaching of the gospel boston wasn't interested just in knowing jesus for himself boston was desperate to make jesus known to others jesus called to simon and andrew and said to them follow me and i will make you fishers i will make you become fishers of men as we follow him and as we learn from him he's going to do a work in us to make us like him the galilean fishermen will make us into fishermen fishing not for creatures with scales but for humans with souls even as we grow deeper into the gospel of jesus christ by following him we'll learn how to let down the nets of the gospel for a catch jesus the great evangelist will make us into evangelists on a recent holiday up to my home village i seem to be talking about that a lot this morning i was in the company of an old fisherman called sandy sandy didn't fish in the rich seas off sutherland but in the inland lochs his method wasn't to let down nets well he never said that wasn't his method but i don't believe a word these guys say his method was to fish with a rod and a fly i listened to him for well over an hour and i asked him loads of questions about fishing and i think that over the space of that hour i learned more about fly fishing than i'd ever known before most of a sutherland's thousand lochs are stocked by landowners with different kinds of trout and sandy was an expert at catching them all his answers to my questions helped me as i work out my own soliloquy on the art of man fishing how can i better evangelize how can i become more effective at fishing for the souls of men so the first question i asked him was sandy how do you know where the trout are in a loch

how do you know where the trout are in a loch now i've spent hours and hours fishing on sutherland's lochs but i've caught very very little so i asked him how he'd gone about having so much success and he answered me he said follow the swallow and the froth follow the swallow and the froth so old sandy looked for areas of the loch where the swallows were flying and the froth was building on the surface of the loch and that's where he put his fly because he knew that swallows only dive onto the surface of the loch where there are insects caught in the froth and that's where the trout rise to the surface to catch the insects he's got the best chance of catching a trout when he follows the swallow and the froth it made me think of areas of thornwood here where there are swallows and froth areas where there's life and activity think of the schools the shopping mall the bars the coffee shops the music scenes the doctor surgeries think of the shops and the supermarkets the social clubs the student halls of residence the busy streets of

[17 : 36] Dumbarton Road and Crow Road where there are areas of life where there's activity there are the swallows and the froth it's in these places that we are to cast our flies we go to where the people are with this message of life and death I then asked old sandy I said sandy do you always use the same fly on your rod he looked at me as though I had three heads and he said no boy I change my fly depending on the loch I'm fishing and the time of year different lochs you see have different species of insects landing on the surface so he changes the fly he's using to best mimic the type of insect on a particular loch similarly the kind of insects landing on lochs change as the year goes on depending upon whether he's fishing in April or in October sandy uses different coloured and shaped flies and again I thought of Thornwood and the many different kinds of people we have here it is unlikely that professionals who work in the city from 8 to 6 will come to our warm space held between 10 and 12 on a Tuesday our warm space will attract a certain type of person but not everyone it is also unlikely that if we only offer a church service in English

Chinese students will be attracted but what if we offered an English as a second language class it's not about changing our message the hook is always on the fly we preach Christ and him crucified unrepentantly but the feathers and the shape with which we attract people may can and must change depending on the type of people we're trying to reach it takes Sandy it took him time to make his own flies he first carefully observes the particular kind of insects on a loch then he goes back to his shed and he makes makes flies as mimics of these insects to be effective evangelists in Thornwood we need to carefully observe the people in our community and what their particular needs are and then think how can I meet their particular needs with the gospel to be a good fisherman requires thought innovation not just hard work and I finally asked Sandy

I said Sandy what's the best catch of fish you've ever had to which he replied I took 190 trout out of a loch in the north of Sutherland one day 190 now of course we know it's in the nature of fishermen to exaggerate but let's assume that he's telling the truth it was a huge catch 190 trout when I asked him where this loch was he suddenly became forgetful because of course he didn't want me to know where he caught them fly old fishermen who's used to the ways of other fishermen let me suggest that one of the sins from which we must repent as a church is having expectations which are far too low far too low God is able to bring 190 people and far more to himself through our work of man fishing and evangelism he is able to send his spirit to make the people of Thornwood willingly swim into the nets of the gospel we have a promise from Christ himself who never hides the location of a bounteous catch of fish by the way because he says the fields are white unto harvest there are so many places in our community where the swallows are flying and the froth is floating the fish are plentiful there and Christ can use us to catch hundreds for him through the gospel we both believe and proclaim the population of Thornwood is roughly equivalent to that of all the fishing villages in Sutherland combined it's a daunting challenge isn't it not but we shouldn't view reaching Thornwood with the gospel as much as a challenge as an opportunity to see the power of Jesus at work through us but we say to ourselves that's all very well

Colin you're trained to be a preacher I don't know where to start I'm afraid of telling other people about Jesus notice how in our passage Jesus does not assume that we'll automatically be fishers of men he says that he will make us become fishers of men old Sandy learned the art of fly fishing from his father but it will be Jesus who makes us fishers of men he will do a transforming work within us through his Holy Spirit to change who we are to make us become something we were not before as we follow him as his disciples he'll change us the more we know him the more we'll want to make him known the closer we follow him the more earnestly we'll fish for him he will change us on the inside so that the message of the gospel will literally burst out from within that doesn't mean we'll be passive any more than we'll be passive in our growth and holiness experienced fly fishermen you know they'll often practice in their back gardens they'll practice casting their rods so that when it comes time to fish they can place their flies in exactly the right place right in the middle of some frost if you're nervous about sharing the good news perhaps that's something we could do practice with another

Christian a novice fly fisherman will often accompany an experienced fisherman to watch how he does it he'll learn by watching again that's something we could do if we're nervous about sharing the gospel accompany an experienced Christian and watch how they do it the key is willingness and commitment not talent and ability none of this takes away from the central truth that the more we know Jesus and his gospel the more we'll want to make Jesus and his gospel known remembering always that the divine fisherman has promised to be with us and to bless our efforts for him Glasgow is not a fishing city we're not sitting in the Harley in Brora today but that doesn't mean that this message means nothing to us Jesus the divine fisherman is letting his nets down for a catch his message is follow me and our message to the world is follow him even as we follow the Lord

[25 : 34] Jesus Christ he promises to make us become fishers of men able evangelists who are willing and able to proclaim the great truths of the gospel and ourselves catch people in the nets of the good news tragedy of my story today old Sanders Sutherland the fisherman who used to go fishing for prannies and was converted in the deck of that boat that day after he'd fallen in and near lost his life well he's in heaven today old Sandy who at the beginning of August when we were up on holiday sat in Auntie Margaret's house as many and his congregation I'm sure have plying him with questions about fly fishing I asked him at the end and where are you with Christ Sandy and where are you with Christ and he says well he said I believe in God I'm not sure what else well old Sandy's funeral was held last week and I can but say that Sandy is probably not where

Sanders is the sea fisherman is with the divine fisherman in heaven but the fly fisherman is probably not which begs one question have you been caught up in the nets of the gospel do you believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross to save sinners and do you believe that you're a sinner indeed of Christ's saving love are you hearing his invitation to come and follow him today come here and come now for the fly of the gospel has been cast out right in front of your face and the nets are down for a catch Jesus is calling you across the sea of time and space as though he were standing in front of your face and looking into your eyes saying follow me and I will make you become fishers of men who should be for men not to die if Jesus is that have you to be known as my losing is