

When You're Ready

The crowds knew the procedure now. When the teacher stood, the session was over. Jesus stood now in Simon's boat and stretched. He had been sitting, tensed against the gentle rocking of the lake. The people soon dispersed. He turned then to Simon. "Let's take the boat out, Simon. It will be peaceful on the water."

Simon protested gently. He still had work to do on the nets, although there were no fish to deliver.

"Jesus, we don't usually take the boats out at this time of day. In any case, I think we must have fished the lake out. We caught absolutely nothing last night."

"If we go out now, we will." Simon looked at Jesus. It was almost as though he had received a physical blow. It was the authority in the Master's voice. Simon would take a long while before he became used to someone telling him what to do. He waited as one caught off balance.

Andrew knew his brother well enough to realise his dilemma. He came to the rescue. "We haven't to do the rounds today. There'll be nothing lost in an hour on the lake. I'll see the nets are finished later."

"All right," Peter spoke first in Andrew's direction, but then to Jesus. "If you say so, we'll go out, AND we'll fish. But I can tell you now, unless they've been breeding pretty fast, we'll not be getting a catch today." He turned away and muttered to the sea, "I've been fishing these waters a long time now."

James and John who had joined them in the boat suggested they should go along. "All right," said Peter. "And I'll tell you what. You can have half the catch. I think it's a fairly safe bet I'll not have to part with much." Jesus didn't take up Peter's caustic challenge. His silence un-nerved the fisherman even more. He stood in the bows as the four men took the boat out past other fishing vessels moored at the quayside, aware of curious glances from their few occupants. There could be awkward questions later.

"This'll do," said Peter as soon as they were out into deeper waters. "Get the net over the side." Jesus had not spoken until now. The four men were startled by his voice. "This side."

"Eh ?". Peter exclamation was verging on anger at being told how to fish from his own boat.

"The fish are this side," said Jesus.

Andrew went to stand beside him. "He's right, you know. There's a shoal of fish right here. Quick, Peter ! The nets !" Andrew scrambled across the boat. The Zebedee boys were right behind him, bundling the net over the side. In moments the net was seething with fish. It took all five of them to haul the catch into the boat.

"What a catch !" Andrew was as excited as a little boy. The Zebedees were laughing and picking up the biggest of the fish to show each other. "You did say half the catch ?" James reminded Peter. Peter did not reply. He was speechless. But his eyes were not on the fish in their death throes. He was staring at Jesus as though he had never seen him before. The next thing he was on his knees, down among the fish. "I'm sorry," he was saying. "Lord, I'm sorry. I haven't begun to see I didn't realise You are.... you are.... Lord!

The others stood now, watching and listening. It dawned on them more slowly that they had seen another miracle. There was no other way to explain it. And Jesus had done it !

"Come on," It was he who broke the silence. "There's nothing to be afraid of. This is just an evidence of the power of God."

"And through you," Peter whispered incredulously.

"Come on now," Jesus repeated. "There's work to do, and when that's done Peter, you and I have some talking to do. "You're going for new catches soon. I want you to be fishing for people."

They did not say much on the return journey, except what was necessary. It took all their time to manage the boat and the fish. When they were nearly through and the Zebedees had taken their share of the catch, Andrew offered to finish off the nets. "I think Jesus wants to talk to you Peter," he said. Jesus nodded approval to Andrew and turned immediately to walk along the shore. Already the sky was reddening across hills, an evening breeze whispering across inlets of the lake.

"The time has come," said Jesus when Simon caught up with him. "We are to leave us all this now. Fishing for men now, Simon."

"You mean you are ready now ?" asked Simon.

"I mean YOU are ready," replied Jesus.

"But, but..." Strange things had happened to Simon today. It was not like him to be lost for words. "But, Master, we thought you were getting ready for your work."

"I am ready, Simon, and I've been waiting for you. Remember how weeks ago I asked you to follow me ?"

"Yes, and I followed you, with Andrew and the others. I said I would come. We've thought about little else since. It's a big thing to have to leave the fishing, and home. James and John have had endless arguments with their father. Mind you that's nothing new."

"But, Simon, you weren't ready. Not before we went fishing."

Simon fell silent again. "*Big man, big mouth, small brain.*" Someone had said that about him once. He'd shown them he was a big man. Later he felt the truth of the 'small brain'. Why can't we undo thoughts, he wondered. Of course he hadn't been ready. Only thought he had.

"Jesus," he said. "You mean the way I feel about you. That's made me ready"

"That's it. Just that. Until this afternoon you wanted to follow me for the glamour, the excitement, a big man doing big things. But now you have been able to see. It isn't your work, it is God's. It's not going to be easy, you know that. You'll be doing things you love to do. You'll be doing things you hate, and thought Simon would never do. But, Simon you'll be building God's kingdom and you'll be claiming glory for the Father."

"I really do want that," said Peter, stopping to look closely into Jesus' face. "Yes, I do. It's all different now. I DO want that."

"And that's why you're ready to come and share my work," Jesus told him. "You were ready the moment you got to your knees among the fish. Men become big men when they've been on their knees. You're ready to change, Simon, ready to learn, ready to grow. You really are my Peter - my rock-man. You're ready to help me build the Kingdom of God."