

Becoming Fishers of Men
Part 3
“Fishing in the Right Places”
Luke 5:1-7
Pastor Charles Price

Now let me read to you from Luke 5. I am going to read you two stories this morning. Luke 5:1. It says,

“One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret,”

(Which, by the way, is another name for the Lake of Galilee)

“with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, he saw at the water’s edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets.

“He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

“When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.’

“Simon answered, ‘Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.’

“When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.

“So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.”

Keep that story in mind. Let me read you now from John 21. John 21, an event after the resurrection of Jesus. John 21:1 says,

“Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias.”

(That, by the way, is yet another name for the Lake of Galilee.)

It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.

“ ‘I am going out to fish,’ Simon Peter told them, and they said, ‘We’ll go with you.’

“So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

“Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

“He called out to them, ‘Friends, haven’t you any fish?’

“ ‘No,’ they answered.

“He said, ‘Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.’ When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’”

John 21:10:

“Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish you have just caught.’

“Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn.

“Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’”

If you have been with us in the last couple of weeks, you know that we are reminding ourselves as to why the church of Jesus Christ exists – not just to give us something to do on a Sunday morning but in order to fulfill the mission of Jesus Christ in our world.

And these past two weeks we have talked about the invitation that Jesus gave initially to Simon and Andrew (one set of brothers) and James and John (another set of brothers) where in Matthew 4:19, He said to them,

“Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

They were fishermen so this was a natural analogy to use with them. The difference between fishing for fish and fishing for men is when you fish for fish, you catch what is alive and it dies.

When you fish for men, for people, you catch that which is dead – spiritually dead – in order that they might come alive.

But the analogy between fishing and reaching people for Christ is an analogy that is used by Jesus on a number of occasions.

Now I pointed out last week – in fact, both the last two weeks – that this contains an invitation and a promise. The invitation is, “Come, follow Me.” That is our business.

That’s not an invitation to become a Christian. Rather it is an invitation to work together with Jesus.

“Follow Me” is a sort of code word for discipleship. And discipleship is keeping in step with Jesus, being where He is and doing what He does.

“And if you follow Me,” He said, (here’s the promise) “I will make you fishers of men.”

Be careful of reducing this to some kind of methodology or program; this is something, which is the work of Jesus Christ, which He is going to accomplish through anybody who will decide to keep in step with Him and walk with Him.

And I have read these two stories to you this morning because they have a lot in common. And they are stories about Jesus intervening and telling fishermen how to fish, demonstrating that fishing is not just a matter of learning a few techniques and tactics; it is learning to live in union with Christ and in obedience to Him.

You see, these two incidents I read have a number of things in common. Both times the disciples were fishing. Both times they were catching nothing. Both times Jesus told them to let their net out on the other side or in another place. Both times they were a little bit resistant and sceptical.

Peter said in Luke 5, “We have fished all night and we’ve caught nothing.” And then he added,

“But because you say so,”

(Even though this seems to me to be a little bit unnecessary and ludicrous - there is nothing here this morning; we have been here all night.)

“But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”

And both times they caught a massive amount of fish that, in Luke 5, the boat began to sink so they called over their friends, James and John, and loaded their boat and that also began to sink.

And in John 21, their net was so full and so heavy it says they could not haul it in.

So both times they caught a massive amount of fish. Both times they were surprised.

And the first time Jesus again linked it to fishing for men because it says Jesus then said,

“Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men.”

“Peter, Andrew, James, John, I talked to you a few weeks ago in Matthew 4. I asked you to follow Me; I will make you fishers of men. Now I am demonstrating how I do it – by casting the net where I tell you.”

And the second time they hauled in so many fish that they counted them and it says it was full of large fish. So these weren’t little trout; these were good-sized fish – 153 of them.

Now a lot of folks have speculated as to why this number is given so precisely and there have been lots of different suggestions as to why this number was given.

The early church fathers speculated that there were 153 different species of fish in the Lake of Galilee, and so catching 153 fish demonstrates that they are going to fish from every nation, every tribe and every tongue. Maybe.

Another early idea was that there were 153 nations in the world at this time and therefore they represent the fact that the whole world is going to be evangelized.

I don’t know if those are the reasons. It could have been that they just counted them because they were intrigued by how many they caught and it just happened to be 153. It could have been 154 but it wasn’t, and there is no special significance.

But the fact that they counted them means that this is an unexpected catch of fish that impressed them and amazed them and surprised them.

And I want to talk about this in relation to the task that Jesus has given to His church, that if we let Him, He will make us fishers of men. He will make us fishers of men.

And included in that is He is going to tell you where to drop the net.

Now there are two messages I want to bring from here – two points. There is a negative message that comes out of these stories. And then secondly, there is a positive message that comes out of these stories.

Here's the negative message: why do you think that the disciples were fishing out of one side of the boat? Well, I tell you why it probably was: because that's what they always did, and they usually caught fish.

You see we love to reduce the process of fishing of men to a predictable pattern or a predictable program that does not require the initiative of God. We just do it the way we have learned to do it.

You see, again and again - you see this through the history of the church - you see it going on all the time. God works in a certain way and we recognize that God is at work and so we are tempted to reduce what God does to a pattern that becomes a human activity and we try to reproduce it and we wonder why it is we stop catching fish.

So we hear, for instance, that there is a revival broken out in some part of the world. So what we tend to do in the west is get our Christian journalists and our Christian photographers and our Christian strategists and we put them on a plane and we fly them to the scene of the revival.

And the journalist reports what he says, the photographer takes some pictures and the strategist reduces it to a program, to a formula, brings it home, puts it in a loose-leaf binder and goes around having seminars on how to have a revival. And we wonder why it doesn't work.

Or we hear there is a church down the road that God seems to be blessing and seems to be growing, and people are coming to Christ. So we send some spies down to find out what they are doing that's different. And when we see what they are doing that we think may be a bit different, we bring it back and try to reproduce it.

Sometimes we look back to the past and we know that God worked in real ways in the past and we try to perpetuate what God did.

I was converted when I was 12 years of age at a Youth for Christ event in England. Youth for Christ in those days; its main ministry was big rallies, as we called them. And they were in many cities across Britain, as they were across the world. It began in the 1940's. Billy Graham was the first Youth for Christ evangelist.

There was a great Youth for Christ here in Toronto that used to meet in the Peoples Church when it was down on Bloor Street. And all across the world these kinds of youth rallies where they had

great music and testimonies and then they had some straight from the hip preaching and inviting people to come to Christ.

And I know when I was a teenager, a lot of my fellow Christians where I lived, had come to Christ through Youth for Christ.

But then after a while the young people stopped coming to the kind of meeting that has proved so popular and effective before, because the meetings didn't change and they carried on the same old way.

And when I started preaching, I got invited to go to some Youth for Christ meetings to preach, or I would go to these meetings. The youth had grown up; they were now middle-aged and they brought their parents with them. And we repeated the old kind of meetings they used to have, and people would grumble and say, "Where are the young people; they aren't interested anymore."

And we thought the pattern is the way God is going to bless, and it wasn't. I remember about 30 years ago speaking at a series of "This is Life" rallies, they were called in Australia.

And "This is Life" had had a great history. And they had these similar kind of things but in different cities and I had been invited there to speak at some of these. And we could have better described them as "This is Death" rallies, because they were longer connecting with people where they were.

The pattern had worked and there were testimonies about how it had worked. But it's far easier, you see, just to repeat the pattern instead of learning what is God doing and where is God working?

I often visit the mission fields of the world and meet some very godly people. And often you talk to a godly older missionary who has been there for years and they all wistfully say, "You know, it's not like it used to be."

And we are tempted to want to make it like it used to be, or make the pattern that we know worked here or there in time, or here geographically, and try and reproduce it somewhere else.

You know we cannot afford to just imitate what God has done elsewhere. We must allow the Lord Jesus Himself to direct us and to be the origin of how it is that we are reaching out to other people and fishing for men.

One of the interesting things about Jesus' own ministry is you could never tie Him down to a pattern. And if you tried to, He would break it.

I know I mentioned this several years ago now, and most of you will have forgotten if you were here, that in Matthew 8 and 9 there are ten distinct miracles in those two chapters that Jesus performed.

And when you look at those ten stories, the way Jesus performed His miracles was different in every case.

The first time there was a leper and Jesus met him and it says He reached out His hand and touched the man. "Be clean!" And the man was immediately cleansed of his leprosy. So He touched him and as He touched him the miracle took place.

And then a centurion came and said, "My servant is at home and sick. Just say the word and my servant will be healed." And Jesus said, "Go home and you will find him well." Jesus didn't see the man, didn't touch him; He just spoke the word.

And then another occasion a paralytic was brought to Him and Jesus looked at him and said, "Your sins are forgiven. Get up and walk." He didn't touch the man. He just spoke to him. He didn't speak about him. He looked him in the eye probably, spoke to him, and the man was immediately healed.

And then a lady came up behind Jesus, a lady in the crowd, and reached out and touched Him. She had been bleeding for 12 years and her hemorrhage stopped and Jesus turned around and said, "Who touched Me?" He didn't touch her; she touched Him. He didn't speak to her to bring about the healing. She just touched Him.

Now this is all very well. We read this, you see, in the gospels and we say, "Yeah, it's fine. We know that because that's what happened.

But if these people in Jesus' day are like we are today, when Jesus left the area they would probably cause some problems. Because some of these people probably got together and they probably said, "You know I was healed by Jesus when He was here."

And somebody else would say, "Yes, so was I."

The first one says, "You know, when Jesus touched me and He put His hands on me, I could almost feel the power of God coming down His arm and through His fingers into my body. Did you feel that when He touched you?"

And the second man says, “What do you...what do you mean, when He touched me?”

“Well, you know, were you healed by Jesus?”

“Yeah, yeah, I was healed by Jesus.”

“Well, when He touched you, did you feel the power of God coming down His fingers?”

“He doesn’t touch people. That isn’t how He heals people.”

“Yes, He does.”

“No, He doesn’t. He just spoke, you know, He just said to me, “Get up!” And there was such authority in His voice and I jumped up. If you think He has to touch you, I think yours is just psychosomatic. Yours is not real.”

So they probably split up, you see (if they are like us), and they formed two different churches.

One forms the touchy church and they meet in one end of the town and they sing their favourite hymns every Sunday – “He Touched Me, altogether touch from the Lord is so real” because that’s what they are about – touch, touch.

The other church forms the church of the word. And they sing every Sunday morning their favourite hymn, “Speak Lord in the stillness while we wait on Thee.”

And then one day somebody else moves into the town who has also been healed by Jesus. And so the leaders of both churches go to meet him and invite him to come to their church.

And they get there at the same time; knock on his door. And the man from the touchy church says, “I hear you have been healed by Jesus.”

“Yes, I have. I was blind and He healed me.”

“That’s fantastic. We have a church in this town. We would love you to come down on Sunday and maybe share your testimony about how He touched you and the way in which His power came into your body.”

“Well, thank you, I would love to come but did you say, “When He touched me?”

“Yes, you know, when you were healed.”

“No, He didn’t touch me.”

And the other man says, “Excuse me, we have a true church in this town as well and we would love you to come down on Sunday morning and just share about how He healed you and when He spoke to you, the authority in His voice.”

“Well, thank you, I would love to come. Did you say, “When He spoke to me?”

“Yeah, you know, when He healed you, He spoke to you.”

“He didn’t speak to me.”

“What do you mean?”

The first man says, “He didn’t touch you?”

“No, He didn’t touch me.”

The second one says, “He didn’t speak to you?”

“No, that isn’t how He healed me.”

“Well, what did He do?”

“Well, He did what He probably always does.”

“Well, what was that?”

“He just spat in my eye. Didn’t He spit in yours?”

Actually the story is a very interesting one because it’s in Mark 8 – and I don’t want to digress but in Mark 8:22, listen to this. It says,

“They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him.”

So, actually it was the friends from the touchy church who brought him! They did not ask Jesus to heal him. They now know the pattern. “We know exactly what He does. Jesus, just touch him, this blind man, just, just touch him, that’s all.”

But the moment you try to lock Jesus into a pattern, He’ll break out of it. I would love to be in the crowd, you know. They are all hanging around. “Wow, we’re going to see a miracle. Here’s a blind man. Look at this.”

And so the crowd goes quiet as Jesus stands in front of the blind man. “We’re going to see a miracle. What’s He going to do?”

And suddenly in the silence they hear ...and He spat in His eye.

And so he probably forms another church – the Church of the Holy Spittle. And they probably sing every Sunday morning, “Spittle of the Living God, fall afresh on me.”

Then another blind man came to Jesus. And the crowd – “we’re going to see a miracle.” (This is in John 9). And as they stood in silence they heard again...and they thought, “oh, here He goes again – that’s what He does with blind people” – and He spat and missed and went on the floor.

He knelt down, began to mix the spittle with the clay, rolled a couple of balls into His hands and went ...into one eye and ...into the other eye. And then said, “Go to the Pool of Siloam and wash.”

Now, if any of you have been to the Jerusalem and ever seen the Pool of Siloam, it’s down some very rickety steps – not the place you send a blind man with two blobs of clay in his eye.

Just in case you think you’ve got the pattern (it’s spitting), He does it differently.

You know this is the exciting thing and it’s also the challenging thing: you cannot be fruitful in the Christian life on automatic mode. You can only be fruitful in the Christian life when your relationship with Jesus Christ is alive and it’s daily and He initiates and directs and guides.

And you see, these men were seasoned fishermen. Galilee was their patch. They had been fishing long before they ever met Jesus. We know with James and John, their father was a fisherman. So probably since the time they could toddle, they toddled into the boat and sat and watched their dad fishing.

They knew all about fishing. They knew all about fishing so much that they did what was automatic – just drop the net down this side.

And comes Jesus, who had never lived on the lake as a boy; He lived inland in Nazareth, was not a fisherman; He was a carpenter. And having said, “I am going to make you fishers of men. Now I want you to understand something: you fish your way and you won’t catch anything. You reduce it to just programming and technique; you won’t catch anything. I am going to make you the fishers of men. I am going to put you in the right place at the right time.”

Do you know why revivals and movements of God rarely live beyond a generation? I’ll tell you why. Because God works and we are so excited that we don’t want to lose it, so we reduce what God does to a formula and to a pattern and it becomes a tradition and it’s dead.

Oswald Smith said, “God raises up a man. The man has a message. The message becomes a movement. And the movement turns into a monument.”

And many of us have seen that happen so many times.

Now there’s no problem learning from movements of God. It’s good to learn from others, but not to imitate.

Don’t look at the pattern of what God is doing; look at the principle that lies behind the pattern. The patterns will bury; the principle remains the same. This is dependence on God and obedience to God and letting Him call the shots and determine what you do.

The disciples had fished on the side of the boat. They knew. They didn’t wake up in the morning and say, “Well which side should we fish?”

No, “We always fish that side.”

And He says, “If you are going to be fishers of men, you are going to have to be ready to fish differently.”

That’s the negative message. The positive message is this: that the Lord Jesus Christ, as Head of His body the church, has the prerogative to move us around, to put us in the right place at the right time for the right purpose that He only may know. You and I may not know what the purpose is.

I love that verse (I quoted it last week) – John 12:26 – where Jesus said,

“Whoever serves me must follow me.”

What does it mean to follow? To keep in step with Him. And then He says,

“And where I am, my servant also will be.”

So the fix point is not “where you are, I will be.” Now we often quote what Jesus did say in Matthew 28, “I will be with you until the end of the age.”

That’s true, but when it comes to effective serving Him and following Him, keeping in step with Him, “Where I am” (that’s the fix point) “my servant also will be.”

So if you are not where Jesus is, you will not be serving Him and you will not be fruitful and effective. It’s about keeping in step with Him.

And sometimes keeping in step with Him will take us off the beaten path, take us off what we anticipated.

Let me give you an example of that with Paul. At the end of Paul’s third missionary journey, he was returning to Jerusalem and on his way, he wrote his letter to the Romans.

And at the end of his letter to the Romans, in Romans 15:23 he says to them this:

“Now there is no more place for me to work in these regions.”

Paul’s strategy was evidently to go to key cities, to evangelize those cities, and the gospel from those key cities would spread out into the regions.

We know, in Ephesus, when he was there for two years, that it says at the end of that time the gospel spread to the whole of Asia (that’s Asia Minor, Turkey).

And so, writing to the Romans, he said, “I have finished the work God gave me to do here and so, after this, I plan to go to Spain,” he says “and I hope to visit you while passing through.”

“Spain is completely unevangelized and I was looking at a map and I saw Jerusalem is here, Spain is there; Rome is about two thirds of the way. So I am going to come and visit you. I have never been to Rome; I am going to visit you on my way to Spain.”

That was his plan. But when he got back to Jerusalem, he got into trouble and he got arrested and he was kept in prison a few days. Some folks plotted to not eat until they had killed him. So Paul, for his own safety, was taken down to Caesarea. He was brought before the Roman Governor, a man called Felix.

Felix said, “Okay, you pay a bribe; you can go free.”

Paul didn’t pay bribes so he stayed there for two years in Caesarea. At the end of those two years, Felix was recalled to Rome, replaced by a man called Festus. Festus wanted to clear up all the backlog of cases, had Paul brought before him.

Paul said, “I am a Roman citizen; you cannot treat me like this. I appeal to Caesar (the highest court in Roman law).

And Festus said, “You have appealed to Caesar; to Caesar you will go.”

He was put onto a boat to be sent to Rome. As you will remember, the boat sank several times on the way, including off the coast of Malta. And Paul spent all of winter in Malta, shipwrecked.

Eventually they got him to Rome. When he arrived in Rome, Caesar wasn’t interested in him and the book of Acts finishes with Paul spending two years under house arrest some of the time, in prison some of the time, in Rome waiting for his trial.

Now two years in Caesarea, two years in Rome, the best part of a year including the whole winter shipwrecked in Malta, the best part of the year getting to Rome. That’s adds up to about five years in round figures where Paul has been out of circulation, where his plans have gone completely wrong, where, as he said when he wrote to the Philippians, “Everybody has forgotten me now. Nobody writes to me except you folks, because out of sight is out of mind.”

And no longer is he fulfilling the ministry he was expecting to fulfill. He certainly didn’t go to Spain. And he wrote to the Philippians during that time.

Now some do debate the exact location where Paul wrote from but almost certainly he wrote this from Rome. (And I will tell you why in a moment.)

And I imagine when the Philippian Christians got this letter and they heard, “We have a letter from Paul from prison in Rome”, they probably thought oh, boy, this letter is going to be a bit of a stinker because Paul will be angry. He has wasted five of the prime years of his life (and by the way, his reason for being imprisoned in Jerusalem in the first place was gossip amongst Christians – that was where it started – you read that in Acts 21.)

He is going to be angry, he is going to be frustrated, he is going to be thwarted. But when they open up his letter, they discover he says things like this: Philippians 1:12:

“I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.”

“Hey, don’t you worry about me and I’ll tell you why: I am in this Roman prison and I am chained to Roman guards.”

And I don’t know whether they had 8-hour shifts, but I imagine when they chained him up to a guard on this side and a guard on this side, he probably said, “Hi, what’s your name? Have you ever heard of Jesus of Nazareth? You’ve never even heard of Nazareth? Okay. Hold on. Hi, what’s your name? My name’s Paul; what’s your name? Have you ever heard of Jesus of Nazareth? You haven’t? Okay. Well look, how long are we going to be chained together? Eight hours? Great! I have got a fantastic story and seeing as you are not going anywhere, I’ll tell you all about it.”

And he told them the story of Jesus. They would unhook him after eight hours; bring in the next shift. “Hi, what’s your name? Have you ever heard of Jesus of Nazareth? You haven’t? What about you? No? Okay, well, let me tell you something; I have been talking for eight hours. I’m tired. I’ll sleep for four. Wake me up in four hours’ time; we’ll have four hours left and I’ll tell you the most fantastic story you’ve ever heard. Don’t wake me up early. Give me four hours and then I’ll tell you the story.”

And these folks went home. Sitting around the table with their families, the wife probably said, “Did you have a good day in the prison today?”

“I had a fantastic day.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I was chained to this man. He told me amazing stories.”

So the kids prick up their ears. “What was the story Dad?”

“Well, it’s about a man called Jesus of Nazareth. Nazareth is a long way away in a place called Israel and He was an amazing man. He was a good man but He went about doing good. He healed the sick. He even raised some people from the dead.”

The kids say, “Wow! Is that true?”

“Yeah, according to this man.”

“Well, what happened to Him?”

“Ha, they killed Him.”

“No!”

“Yeah, they crucified Him.”

“Oh no, why did they crucify a good man like that?”

“That’s not the end of the story.”

“Well, what’s the end of the story Dad?”

“Three days later the tomb was empty. Why do you think it was empty?”

“I don’t know – did somebody steal it?”

“No.”

“Did they look in the wrong tomb?”

“No. You’ll never guess. He was raised again from the dead. Do you know what this man Paul told us? He is alive and He is willing to live in our lives.”

And so the whole palace guard not only hear the gospel and come to Christ, but at the end of the letter to the Philippians he says in Philippians 4:22,

“All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar’s household.”

Why is there a church in Caesar’s household? (This is, by the way, evidence it was written from Rome – that’s where Caesar’s household was.)

There was a church in Caesar’s household because Paul was in Caesar’s prison. Why was Paul in Caesar’s prison? He tells us in Philippians 1:16,

“I am put here for the defense of the gospel.”

Notice that – “I am put here.”

This is not a fluke; this is not an accident. “I am put here by whom?” By the Lord Jesus Christ. Because it was the prerogative of the Lord Jesus Christ to look over Paul’s shoulder as he wrote his letter and he says, “Well, I am going to go to Spain and on my way to Spain I will come and visit you in Rome.”

And it was the prerogative of the Lord Jesus Christ to say, “Paul, that’s a great idea, great idea, but I am sorry I am going to have you fishing on the other side of the boat. I am going to put you somewhere else.”

I was listening to a tape by Jill Briscoe just yesterday – a CD – and she quotes Steve Brown on that CD. And she said that Steve Brown said, “If you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans.”

As the book of James says, “Don’t say, ‘I will do this and I will do that.’ Say, ‘If the Lord wills, I will do this and I will do that.’”

And you see, the privilege that is given to you and to me, if we are genuine disciples of Jesus Christ and we are walking in step with Him and we are saying, “Where You are, I want to be; I want to be on Your business,” we need to keep our ears to the ground. (That might not be the best metaphor – our ears to heaven.) And you get put.

About 3 years ago I was flying from Entebbe in Uganda to London in England to connect with a flight back home to Toronto. And after about an hour of the journey, we were over southern Sudan when the aircraft developed a vibration, which the captain assured us, did not endanger the aircraft, but it shouldn’t be happening anyway, so we needed to go and land somewhere.

So we turned back and went to Nairobi. The aircraft was then grounded until it was corrected and so we were put on to different alternative flights to London. And we had to wait until the flight that night (at least, I did) and we were given a food voucher to go to the restaurant.

The restaurant was jam-packed because everybody was in there using their food vouchers. And there were no tables free for sure, but there was a man sitting by himself at a table with four seats at it, so I got my food (it was like a buffet), got my tray, went over and I said, “Do you mind if I sit with you at this table?”

He said, “Not at all.”

So I sat down with him. We began chatting. He was actually a Christian man and he was a medical doctor who had spent three months in Rwanda in a hospital there, which he did every year. And he was now on his way back home to the U.K.

And we were talking and sharing together when suddenly from nowhere a young man, mid-twenties, suddenly slid across into the seat direct opposite me. He leaned over halfway across the table and said, "Are you a born again Christian?"

I said, "Is that good or bad?"

He said, "Are you a born again Christian?"

I said, "Why do you ask?"

He said, "I was listening to your conversation. You sound as though you might be."

I said, "Yes, I am a born again Christian and this is Dr. So and So. He's a born again Christian. Are you?"

"No," He said, "I am not. But I wanted to meet one on this journey."

I said, "Really? Why is that?"

He was also from England. He was in the British army. He was married to a Ugandan lady. They had a little daughter and they had been together in Uganda. He was now going back to England to his base and within a few days he was going to Iraq.

And he said, "I said good-bye to my wife and my daughter this morning and I had this terrible fear. I fear for them. I have his feeling they may not be safe and I have no reason for it. Or I fear for myself that maybe I will never come back, never see them again. And all I want you to do is pray for my wife and daughter."

I said, "Well, I would love to pray for your wife and daughter but let's talk about you as well." And we shared with him the gospel. He didn't know too much about it. He was open, interested. We prayed for his wife and daughter and prayed for him.

He was flying on a Kenya Airways flight to London, which left. He went and I was going on a British Airways flight, which was a little bit later.

When I got to Heathrow Airport, before picking up my bag, I went into the washroom and he was in there. His flight had been a bit delayed. He had arrived just before us. He was in the washroom. I recognized him from the back. I tapped him on the shoulder. He said, “Are you following me?”

I said, “Well, I wasn’t intending to, but maybe I am.”

He said, “I have been thinking on the flight all night. I have been thinking about what we talked about.”

We sat and talked some more. We prayed together.

When I connected to my flight to Toronto, when I got home, there was an e-mail from him. He had gone to where he lived. I had given him my e-mail. He had checked out the Peoples Church website. He had e-mailed me. And we e-mailed for a number of weeks. I last heard from him when he was back in Iraq and have heard nothing from him. And he has not replied to my e-mails for a while.

But you know, on a plane going back to London, God, I can imagine saying, “you know there is a fish flapping around in Nairobi Airport, needs catching, needs somebody. Ah, here’s one but he’s on the flight in the wrong direction. Okay, we’ll give him a bit of vibration in the aircraft and bring it down and bring it back.”

It’s not a technique. Don’t go into airport restaurants and hope that, you know, you will grab one. Let God be original and He will be, as he always is.

Paul says, “Don’t worry about me because the great thing I have learned is this: I have my plans, that’s true.” And of course we should have our plans. If you want an example of that, there’s one. Paul had his plans. But they are totally subject to veto by the Lord Jesus because He has His plan too.

And sometimes we don’t see it in advance. We don’t see it at the time. We mostly see the will of God in retrospect. You look back and see, as Abraham’s servant said when he went to find a wife for Isaac and he came back faster than Abraham expected, “How did you manage it?” He said, “I, being in the way the Lord led me.”

In other words, “I did what was right before God and it was His job and He led me.” And so He will.

But you know, sometimes it's hard for older people like myself because we are comfortable with ways in which we like to see God working. We treasure the memories of God working deeply in people's lives.

But the danger is that we begin to limit God. Why is it that often – not always – often newly planted churches tend to be the most effective? Why often is that the case? It's because they haven't yet got their formulas; they are looking to God, "What should we do?"

But once they have been going for a few years and the next generation steps in, they simply adopt the formula that the earlier generation found in dealing with God and they begin to lose their life.

That's why every generation of God's people must ask again, "Lord, You are the head of this body, You are the One who will make us fishers. And that means that You have the prerogative to say, 'Stop fishing on that side of the boat, Simon, Andrew, James, John. Although you know how to fish, I want you to do something on the other side.'"

And I love Peter's response. "Well, we have labored all night, we have toiled all night and caught nothing."

You read into that. "We're wasting our time."

"But," (I love it) "because You say so, we'll do it."

And that of course has got to be the mantra, if you like, of the church of Jesus Christ. "Because You say so, we sense and discern and hear Your voice."

When Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, locked up in jail, you can imagine he wasn't saying, "How did that happen? That's gone totally wrong. What's going -oh, man, just send out a prayer request and circulate it as wide as we can – pray that I will be released within three days."

No. That's what we would do.

But say, "Lord, I wasn't planning this. It would be nice if it's over in three days but if it's not, I am put here. I am put here. It's not an accident."

"I'm put here for the sake of the gospel," he said to the Philippians.

Now actually when he wrote to the Ephesians, also from prison, he said, "Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ" – that's how he called himself. He didn't say, "Paul, a prisoner of a corrupt Roman

system, Paul a prisoner of gossips in Jerusalem who started the rumour that got me arrested, Paul, a prisoner of Felix the governor of Judea.”

No, he said, “I am a prisoner of Jesus Christ. It doesn’t matter who the jailer is; I am here by divine appointment.”

And this is the adventure of Christian living. And when these men did as the Lord had told them; when they put the net over the side in Luke 5, it was so full the boats began to sink. The boat was overwhelmed.

Wouldn’t it be utterly fantastic if this boat, the Peoples Church, began to sink because there were too many converts? Wouldn’t that be wonderful?

And the other – John 21 – the net was so full, they couldn’t haul it in, it says at first. And then later it says they did get it in; Peter got it in. And they counted them; there were so many.

And if you and I are true disciples – we’re not followers of the Peoples Church, we’re not followers of the Evangelical movement, we’re not followers of any thing; we’re followers of Jesus Christ. That means where He is, we need to be.

“Lord, You are the fix point in this. We want to discern Your mind and Your will and we want to read into all the circumstances the divine providence, the divine initiative that works out a purpose.

Some of you, in your ordinary life – I talked to somebody this morning whose life fell apart this last week and he said, “I was angry but this morning when you finished speaking, I said, ‘Lord, thank You. I fell apart to be put where I am for the sake of the gospel.’”

Maybe there are some of you here this morning and you don’t know Christ at all, so a lot of what I am saying is a bit kind of confusing because you will never understand the Christian life unless you understand there is a living Jesus Christ involved in it. It’s not just methods, jumping through hoops, learning things by rote. It is a living relationship with a living Jesus Christ.

And if you have been here this morning and you are listening, or you are listening on television and you say, “This is outside the realm of my experience”, it doesn’t need to be that way.

You can say to Him this morning, “Lord Jesus, bring me into that living relationship with Yourself.” And you just have to say, “Lord, I recognize I am separated from You. Forgive me for my sin. You died to pay for my sin. You rose again to impart Your Holy Spirit to live in me in order – not just to save me, but then to guide me and lead me and make my life make sense.”

And you can do that this morning. I am going to pray in closing just now. I am going to pray for those of us who are Christians that we would not just be Christians; we would be disciples. That's really – we'll be on His mission.

And for those of us who are not, that we will come into that living relationship with Him this morning. And as the service finishes, there will be several people at the front who would love to talk with you, pray with you, help you to enter into this.

As people do most weeks, we invite you also to enter into this living relationship with Jesus Christ as He draws you to Himself.

Let's pray together. Father, we are so grateful this morning that we are not simply a group of people who are in Your fan club and we're down here and You're up there, or You're back in history.

But You are the One whom we know, whom we experience, whom we love and by whom we are loved. You are the One who has promised to guide us and You are always as good as Your promises. And I pray, Lord, as we seek to be disciples of the Lord Jesus, that as You have committed Yourself to make us fishers of men, that we will have that incredible joy of catching fish where we don't expect it - men and women, boys and girls.

And we look to You to be the One who guides where we drop the net and guides the people we bump into. For those in this room for whom things seem to have gone wrong and yet they are yielded to You, thank You they have been put – it is not an accident – for the furtherance of Your purpose and Your interests.

And for those of us who don't know You, I pray Lord Jesus, that by the Holy Spirit, as only You can, that You will draw them to Yourself and give them the joy of knowing what it is to be forgiven, and the barrier between them and You broken down, reconciled to God and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Make this real for some this morning we pray. In Jesus' Name, Amen.