

THE UPWARD PULL OF JESUS

Luke 5:1–11

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This message this morning from Luke 5:1–11 is the “The Upward Pull of Jesus.” We’re going to use this Scripture as a jumping off place to some other passages which deal with the call of Peter. We sometimes go into relationships with this noble view that, if we can befriend someone, we can pull them up. We have to be careful to measure the strength, whether we have the strength to do that. I’ve known some people who get into romance and marriages and think, “I’ll be the Messiah for this person,” and it doesn’t work that way.

When it comes to Jesus, He is seeking to pull us up. Often we think, “There’s so much wrongness in me, Jesus couldn’t possibly get me on a higher level.” But to say that would be to underestimate the power of His strength. I want you to look today at how Jesus dealt with one man. Let that one man be an example for all of us of the upward pull of the Lord.

The Lord’s work in Simon Peter’s life shows that discipleship is not a one-time call but it is a many-times decision. We will think wrongly of discipleship if we think, “Christ calls us once and that’s it.” We see discipleship rightly if we understand that Christ comes to us, like He came to Peter, and calls us again and again and again.

The call of Peter to be a disciple—that’s reflected in this passage of Scripture, Luke 5:1–11—is actually the third time Jesus called Peter to follow Him. I want to look at the two times before this moment and the four times after this moment. There are seven times in all in the Gospels where Jesus comes to Peter anew and calls him to discipleship. I have a purpose in doing this, as you’ll see when we come to the close of the service today.

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I. The first time that Jesus called Peter, we might say that He pulled him up to a new self-concept.

That story is told for us in John 1:42. It is the first time they meet. Jesus has just been baptized by John, down by the Jordan. Peter has come out of Galilee and he's down there, perhaps with his brother Andrew, because they're sort of following John. Andrew finds Jesus, then Andrew goes to get his brother Peter. Peter—or Simon—comes to Jesus, and the first words that Jesus ever says to this man are so ablaze with insight and a change for his life; these are the words, “You are Simon, son of John.” That locates him. That tells who he's been all the years of his life up to this moment. But then Jesus says, “You will be called Rock [Peter—a stable person someone whom I can build upon].” And in that one moment, Jesus makes for this man a psychological and spiritual breakthrough. He gives him a whole new way of thinking about himself which he could never get away from after that time.

When Jesus calls us, He does the same thing with us. The minute we become His child through the new birth, He calls us sons and daughters of God. The New Testament letters speak of us as saints. There are many days we don't feel like saints and we'd like to reserve the word “saint” for somebody who's really holy. But it's a complimentary and true word of faith used for each one of us by God. The first thing the Lord does when He calls us is to raise us up to a new level of understanding of who we really are in Him. That's the case with Peter. You'll never be the same once you've met Jesus. He's got an idea of what you can be that so surpasses anything you have. He'll never let you go. He'll never stop working with you until His vision for you has come to pass.

If this had been the only call that Jesus had ever made to Peter, he would've probably faded back into the regular tapestry of life. He would've gone back to Capernaum and been a fisherman. He

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would have gone into the woodwork of Galilee and disappeared and dropped out of sight. But it was not the only call that Jesus made to him, as we shall see. Jesus makes more than one call to us as well.

II. The second call that Jesus makes to Peter is found in Mark 1:16 and following. It shows that Peter has gone back to his regular employment.

He is a fisherman by trade. His family owns boats. James and John, the brothers, also own their boats with Zebedee, their father. While Peter followed Jesus from the Jordan River up to Jerusalem, where Jesus began His ministry in the Gospel of John, and cleansed the temple, then perhaps Peter came back with Jesus to Cana of Galilee, where He did His first miracle at the marriage feast. But now, after those events, Peter's gone back again and is working at the regular life. He's followed Jesus in the first flush of enthusiasm but now reality has set back in. There is a family to feed. There's work to be done. There are chores to be performed. There are habits to be kept. So he's back. It's hard to shake the ruts and the routines of the old life. So Peter had gone back to doing his regular thing.

It should be noted, by the way, that Peter is not some degenerate—although the Lord certainly calls those who have a moral degeneracy in their life. I think of him as good, middle-class family man who's trying to make an honest living, probably a member of the Kiwanis club of Capernaum. When Jesus comes to Peter the second time, He says, "Follow Me and I will make you to become a fisher of men." What's so intriguing to me is that Jesus uses that word "become" in association with the second call, where He is lifting Peter up, pulling him up to a life of greater meaning and fulfillment. What Jesus is essentially saying to Peter is, "Peter, there's more to life than making a living. There's more to life than simply fulfilling some comfortable routine or settling into your easy chair at night." Peter, at this age in life—and we

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don't know what age he was, the guesses are anywhere from the early twenties to the mid-thirties—is through with all of his formal education. He's gone to as much school as he's ever going to go to. He's not trying for any kind of advancement. He's not working up the corporate ladder. He's a fisherman by trade and, by the time you come across Peter, he's as good a fisherman he's ever going to be. What's basically ahead of him is to live out the normalcy of life, going on day after day, doing the same things, day after day. Jesus comes to this man, who is already at that age in life—a creature of habit, a creature of custom, a creature of his culture—and says, “I want you to become.”

Jesus knows that each one of us, like Peter, has the capacity to become stuck, to cease developing. So He comes, in this second call to Peter to discipleship, and raises him out of that level of being stuck, causes him to become unstuck and says to him, “There's more that you can be. I will call you to become.” Life isn't at an end where you're at now. There's more ahead for you. I'll raise your life to meaning and fulfillment.

Isn't it good that the Lord does this for us? That He calls us to meaning and fulfillment? To challenges that we feel inadequate for? In my pastor's letter this week I informed that this Sunday completes fourteen years of service as your pastor. I was thinking, this week, about the circumstances I found myself in fourteen years ago. Comfortable, at ease, campus pastor of Evangel college in Springfield, Missouri, where a thousand students every week would come out to hear me preach—because they were required to attend chapel. I could have had that audience for the rest of my life. It was comfortable. I have to work to get an audience now... Kidding! But the Lord called me at that moment. Stirred up my level of comfort, made me “dis-at-ease,” that I might find myself doing His will in coming here.

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If there is a point in your life where you're getting to the place of just repeating the routine, and you find yourself stuck and you're not growing, the Lord speaks to you through this Scripture, speaks to you through this service, and says, "I didn't call you to get stuck. I called you to grow. I called you to become. I called you to do My work. I called you to a level of involvement with My kingdom that is greater than you think you have the ability for. Come follow Me. Trust Me anew with your life."

III. The third call of Peter is the call we find in Luke 5:1–11, where He pulls Peter out of his own inadequacy. Peter again has returned to fishing.

Notice, after he has met Jesus at the Jordan in Mark 1, he's back at his old regular job again. Then after Jesus calls him in Mark 1 and says, "I'll cause you to become," it's a matter of later, perhaps months, when we come to Luke 5, and what's he doing? He's gone back to the old life. The habits, the routines have such a strong grip on him. So, he is fishing again, toiling all night for the catch, because the nighttime was the better time to catch the fish. So Jesus appears again. And He's going to reveal Himself by the lakeside as He appropriates a boat of Peter's and teaches from the boat, and tells Peter and the others to go back into the water and they would catch fish.

Some people see spiritual development as a straight line. When you follow Christ, you're at a level here and your goal is to be glorified, to be totally perfect, in His presence. We call that term, related to the final incorporation of our glorified body, our "resurrected body." But some people see the lines between where we start out and where we end up as sort of a straight climb. We start off following Christ, and it's a good steady climb, straight up the mountain of spiritual development until you get to the top, when you're with the Lord. Unfortunately, it doesn't work quite that neatly.

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Other people see it as sort of a jagged line. You go up and down in your walk with Christ. There are mountain peaks and there are valleys. Hopefully, the valleys are higher than the last valley was, and the one before that.

I tend to see spiritual development as a series of loops that you're taking. At times, don't you feel like you're going in a circle with your life? The loops keep getting higher as you go forward... regress, forward, regress. Peter's kind of this way. He's gone forward at Jordan, and regresses. He's gone forward when Jesus called him in Mark 1, and regresses. He's now going to go forward again in Luke 5. We'll see, too, that he after that, he regresses. But each time, he gets to a new level of commitment from which he doesn't retreat. Jesus uses Peter's boat and shows Peter that He knows more about fishing than Peter. I think that's what impresses Peter so much about Jesus. *He's a carpenter. He doesn't know anything about fishing.* But He shows Peter that He knows!

He knows more about your work than you know about it. That's one of the things when we're getting stuck at a problem at work or a dilemma in our jobs. We need to find—again—the Christ who comes to us as we pray to Him and seek Him, who really knows more about our business than we know ourselves. He does this beautiful miracle for Peter, which perhaps makes Peter realize that, if he's going to obey the call of Jesus, Jesus is going to take care of him. Jesus gives him a big enough catch to put money in the bank and feed his family for probably a year. Jesus gives him so much fish, Luke tells us that the boats nearly sink. So He's concerned with Peter's well-being.

Peter feels so inadequate over what the Lord has done, that he feels totally unworthy of Jesus' interest. He says, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." In other words, he's saying, "What in the world do You have to do with me? You can do such miracles. What do You need

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with a guy like me? Let me stay home. Call somebody who's more qualified than I." Isn't that often our reaction when the Lord puts His hand on our shoulder and calls us to do something? Maybe it's something like teaching a class, a Sunday School class or being a witness. We say, "So and so is far more qualified than I. Why don't You call them? Depart from me. I don't have the ability. I'm not worth wasting Your time on."

But the Lord comes to us as He comes to Peter. He says, "From hereafter, you're going to catch people alive." That's the meaning of the Greek term. You've been catching fish for death. Now you're going to catch people for life. From that time on, Simon follows Jesus full time. He never goes back. We see later, after the Resurrection, that he doesn't ever go back to his old employment. Whereas, after the first call he had gone back, after the second call he had also, but from the third call on, he is with the Lord on a full time basis.

IV. There is a fourth call that the Lord then lays upon Peter's life.

It's a call that calls him up when he becomes fearful. The story of that call is found in Matthew 14:29–31. It's also found in the other Gospels. The incident is the second storm at sea, where the disciples had been out all night, rowing against the violent wind. Jesus comes walking across the water. Peter's the only one in the boat who says to Jesus, "Bid me to come to You." He volunteers to get out of the boat and try walking on the water himself. The Lord says, "Come." But when Peter, stepping out of the boat, fixes his eyes not on the Lord but on the wind, and begins to sink, he calls out for help. The Lord reaches out His hand and catches him and says to him, "You of little faith. Why did you doubt?" Jesus' feet are so firmly on the water that He's able to pull Peter up. When somebody's drowning, they're all over you. If you're a good swimmer, you've just got to hold on to keep from drowning yourself. But Jesus, standing on the water, shows His grasp over the material and natural order, and brings Peter up.

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Peter would have never had his problem with fear if he had played it safe. If he had stayed in the boat, he would have been ok. The times we get fearful in life are the times we find ourselves in water over our own head...maybe because of a chance we have taken, maybe a risk, maybe a venture. Maybe it's been a risk or adventure for the Lord. And we find that things are not going as we expected.

What fears are you coping with in life? Are you crying out today, a little bit like Peter, that you're very intimidated and frightened about what is going on around you? Jesus will not let you go down.

The tape of this service is sent to missionaries all over the world. I had a very strong sense—as I was preparing this message—that God, through this sermon, would speak to some missionary when they have the occasion to listen to this tape. And someone weeks from now is going to hear this and say, “That describes me exactly. I've gotten involved in something I knew was the Lord's will. The Lord called me here. But now, the circumstances are so overwhelming I don't see how I can possibly survive or how the ministry in this place can survive or how the Lord can work through this circumstance.” You'd never been in this trouble if you hadn't gotten out of the boat and obeyed the Lord's call to begin with. But that's exactly why the Lord is going to come to you and rescue you. We're not to fear in times like this, even though this tendency is great, we can say, “The Lord is our helper.” And the Lord is not going to let any of His children go down in despair and defeat any more than He allowed Peter to go down in despair and defeat; because He is pulling us up out of our fears.

V. The fifth time the Lord calls Peter is when He pulls him back on course when he was wrong.

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In Matthew 17:22 and Mark 8:33, Peter takes Jesus aside and tells Jesus that He's dead wrong on a matter. That verse comes immediately after Peter had made a great breakthrough in his life. He had been the first disciple to correctly identify Jesus as the Messiah and accept Jesus as the Messiah on Jesus' own terms. Now, having made the great breakthrough of his life, Jesus begins teaching them, for the first time, that He's going to Jerusalem to die—be killed—and rise after three days. Peter doesn't agree with that. He doesn't agree with that kind of vision for the future at all. So he takes Jesus and begins to correct him. The Word says, "He took him and rebuked him." He said, "Jesus, You're wrong." And Jesus, turning and seeing His disciples, the Gospels say, rebuked Peter and said, "Get thee behind Me Satan." The guy he had called Rock He now calls Satan. "Get thee behind Me Satan, for you're not on the side of God but on the side of man." And what He's telling Simon at this moment is, "When you try to divert Me from the cross, you're diverting Me from the Father's will." And He needs to correct Simon for getting out of God's will.

There are times when, like Peter, when we feel like Jesus doesn't know what He's doing. Do you ever feel like that? You might say, "If I were God, I wouldn't have done it that way. I can't possibly understand why Jesus is allowing this." I've been so upset with the Lord; on occasions I've been downright angry with Him. Lord, how could You let this happen? I prayed three times. I asked, I sought, I knocked and it wasn't opened. I agreed in Your name and I did all those things and it still didn't happen.

One of my last times, I was at my home church—before I came here as pastor—of Central Assembly in Springfield, Missouri, I recall the pastor had asked Mr. Ward to lead in prayer. He was, for many years, the radio speaker of Revival Time, the Assemblies of God radio ministry. The way he called him to pray was sort of abnormal. Mr. Ward was sitting in the congregation.

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He has a voice that can be heard by two thousand people anyway. He bellowed out, “O Lord, we’re here this morning to complain!” I thought, to complain? All the prayers I know begin with “We’re thankful and we praise You,” but he was there to complain. What he was really doing was creatively restating the prayer request. We complained that sister so and so was home and sick... He took all the prayer requests and called them complaints, which is kind of a nice way of dealing with them. But there are times when I feel like that, “O Lord, I am here this morning to complain!”

Jesus came to Simon Peter, who was there to complain about his going to the cross and to correct Him. Jesus was there to pull him back on course when he was wrong.

VI. A sixth time when Jesus called Peter was when he bent down before Peter when Peter was proud (John 13).

They’re in the Upper Room. Jesus wants to teach His disciples the meaning of His death by giving them the Lord’s Supper. He wants to give them a tremendous teaching on the Holy Spirit—John 13–16—and give them insight into His intercessory prayer as high priest to the Father—John 17. All these things are on His heart. It’s the evening before His death, yet He can’t teach them a thing, because they’re all sitting there and arguing with one another about who’s the greatest. Because they’re arguing about who’s the greatest, He practiced the Near Eastern custom of washing one another’s feet.

Love, however, never quits serving...no matter how deep the failure in the one loved. And Jesus doesn’t quit serving, either. We looked at something in the Book of Job that’s so important: Tying to get behavior corrected in someone whose behavior we’d like to see changed. Job’s friends wanted his behavior changed, but all they did was lecture him; tell him what he was doing wrong. But that never really changes anybody. It’s love that really changes people. So

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Jesus doesn't do one of these numbers of self-pity and, "You should be attending to My needs and, what's wrong with you?" You've been with Me three years, and how come you're not different and how come you're not more loving? And all those kinds of good things He could have said to them. He spoke to them very wordlessly. He goes and takes a towel, girds Himself with it, takes a basin and washes their feet. Loving them and setting an example for them; correcting Peter and the others when they were proud and refused to care for each other.

I can identify with sensitive people on a feeling level because I'm kind of sensitive person and I've found that my feelings can easily be hurt. And when my feelings are hurt, it's hard for me to take the lead in reconciliation. I can so easily say, "If that's the way the person's going to treat me, they can go do their own thing." I'm not real good at taking the towel and serving.

But Jesus gives us a model of love, gives Peter a model of love and pulls him back as a disciple when he is proud. He bends down before him when he is self-sufficient.

VII. The seventh call that Jesus makes to Peter's life: He pulls Peter back up when he has sinned terribly.

Jesus was preparing to go to the cross and He prophesied that all of His disciples would fail Him. He said especially to Peter, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail and, when you are turned back, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:31). Peter went out from that moment and denied the Lord three times. Luke 22:61 tells us that, after his third denial, the words of cursing and denial were so loud they reached Jesus' ears, who was on trial before Caiaphas. And Luke tells us that Jesus turned and looked at Peter. The penetration of that look, as Peter knew the Lord had heard the denial. So Peter slips out into the night. He is away, absent from the cross. When Jesus rises again from the dead, it's His mission to restore Peter, who had sinned so terribly and had failed Him so

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miserably. But He knows—the Lord of glory knows—that Peter, at first, is not going to feel worthy of being restored. So the angel tells the women at the tomb, in Mark 16:7, the news, “Go tell the disciples and Peter...” Notice the insertion of that little phrase. He could have simply said, “Go tell the disciples,” because Peter was a disciple. But the Lord Himself knew that Peter now was excluding himself as a disciple. So the message had to be, “Go tell the disciples and Peter.”

Then, when you come to John 21, you find Peter back in Galilee, where the restoration is going to take place. There had been a three-fold denial. There would be a three-fold restoration. Peter is once more back at the old life. The same life he had gone to after the first call, the same life he had gone to after the second call. Now, with Jesus risen from the dead, Peter is beside himself; knowing he had sinned terribly, he’s back fishing again. The Lord appears. Re-does the miracle of Luke 5. The same miracle repeated again. And then He tells Peter—this time using a different word—basically Jesus is saying, “The first time I called you to catch people alive. I told you to be a fisherman—a fisher of men. Now I’m asking you to be a shepherd. Feed My sheep. Take care of My lambs.” And in that great word of restoration, Jesus brings Peter up and brings him back into full place as one of His cherished disciples. Jesus would not go away from Peter.

Luke 5:8 says that Peter had pleaded with the Lord after the miracle of the catch. “Go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man.” One preacher, in preaching on this text, said that this speaks to us of “the comfort of rejected petitions.” The Lord God rejects some of our pleas. Jesus would not go away from Peter, albeit Peter went away from Him numerous times. Albeit we go away from Him numerous times, Jesus keeps renewing His call.

He pulled Peter up to a new self-concept. He pulls Peter up to a life with greater meaning and fulfillment. He pulls Peter up out of his own inadequacy. He pulls him up when he is fearful. He

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pulls him back on course when he was wrong. He bends down to Peter when he is proud. And He pulls Peter back up when he had sinned terribly.

We feel that, because of our sins, no one can pull us up. But our elder brother, the Lord Jesus Christ, can pull us up and does pull us up. It's His intention to do so.

Many churches I grew up in had a bad theology, the kind of theology that says, "You're saved by grace but you're kept saved by works. So if you've done anything wrong between this Sunday and last Sunday, you need to walk to the altar and get saved again." I don't know how many times as a kid I walked down an aisle to give my life to Jesus Christ again. As I got into college, and later into seminary, I grew sophisticated and now can look back on that and say that was theologically incorrect. Because we're saved and then we're kept. What I now am beginning to realize, at the age I'm at now, is that, while that was not theologically correct, it sure was biblically right in terms of methodology and it sure was psychologically correct. The call to follow Jesus Christ is not just a one-time call. It is a call that needs to be repeated time and time again.

There are moments in our life when that call doesn't have the power it did when we first were called. There are things that have come up in our life and our eyes have gotten on other things and we've quit following the Lord. We've gone back to doing the old things, still naming ourselves as a disciple but further out from Him; following Him at a distance. We're back into the old life. Back into the old sins, back into the old routines. Maybe we've had some tragedy happen in our life, in our family, in our marriage, and we're back and we're not tight, close to the Lord. And the Lord needs to come to us again and again and again and say to us, and keep saying to us, "Follow Me." He needs to pull us back in when we're off course. He needs to lift us up

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when we have fallen. He needs to let us know (which He does) that He is restoring us when we have sinned terribly. All we have to do is keep coming when He calls.

I realize now, in looking back, how valuable it was in my own life that many times I walked an aisle symbolically, showing that my commitment was to Jesus Christ. I need Him anew.

Yesterday's call was good, but it's not enough to last today. I need to renew my discipleship today.

I think it's that sense in which I come to the close of this service today, that you may find yourself in this service saying in your own heart, "Pastor, you described exactly what needs to happen in my life because I too need to—and want—to renew the terms of my discipleship to Jesus Christ today. Because He's laying His hand upon me. Because His love is not letting me go. Because He's finding me anew where I am."

I'd like to ask you—as this service comes to a close and we have a time of response—to look within your own heart and to say, "Am I willing to respond to the call of discipleship that Jesus is asking of me in my life?" If you're willing to do that, I'd like—whether this is the first time you've ever made a commitment to Jesus Christ or the tenth time you've made a commitment—for you to come forward and stand here as a group. We're not going to ask the prayer counselors to come today. We're going to ask them to be on either side to anoint people who are ill and want to come for prayer. The sick can go to either side. I'd like to see this front just filled with people who want to say, "I'm here again. My being here is a statement that I am renewing my discipleship to Jesus Christ."

I want to say, too, a special word to you friends who maybe for some years have not moved from where your spiritual relationship was years ago. That the Lord is coming to you just as graciously and just as wonderfully today as He came to Simon Peter of old and is saying, "It's

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time to go higher. It's time to go deeper. It's time to walk with Me closer than you've ever walked with Me before. I'm calling you."

Closing Prayer

Now, our heavenly Father, we ask that now, in this time of response to You, Your Spirit would be upon us in a very special way. There are people in this service who have a real hunger and love for You. For one reason or another, maybe the call of discipleship has grown somewhat stale and inactive. You're calling these in this service to renew their commitment. Others in this congregation are at a moment in their life when they're aware, as never before, of their own inadequacy and they need Your adequacy. Others, Lord, are fearful. Tremendous things have happened to them which are scary and so disturbing. They don't know who to turn to except You. And, Lord, in the midst of their own personal storm, You're appearing to them again, saying, "Trust Me. Let me take your hand. I'll pull you up to safe ground. It'll be ok." There are some here who have failed You. Who have sinned greatly, in spite of having so much grace available to them. Yet something has come up, and what they didn't think they were capable of doing has happened. And, Lord, You're calling those of Your own—who have had this time of failure in their life and sinned—back to You, back to fellowship, back to a clean slate. I think, Lord, of the person in the congregation who shared with me that their life was just like a cracked mirror and that, some months ago, You spoke to in a service and said You were going to have Your hand over that mirror, so that no one would ever be able to tell the crack was there. You most perfectly repair and restore what cannot be naturally restored. Now, months later, this indeed happened. The crack was totally gone. The life was new because You had repaired it emotionally from the inside out. I believe You're going to do that, Lord, for people here today, when we feel broken and when we feel worthless, thinking, "If I had just not done that." You can

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repair and restore and pick us up and call us. So, Lord, as we come to this moment, let this time of commitment be filled with meaning for our life. Let us respond, not as to a man but as to You, Lord. And express, by just a symbolic action, that we want to take up our cross and follow You. We want to be Your disciples, indeed. We thank You, Lord. We know there's going to be a response. We know Your Spirit's at work. In Christ's name, amen.