

Stephen Paul Fleming was the New Zealand Cricket Captain from 1996 until 2007. An elegant left-handed batsman, he was considered by some to be one of the best leaders of a cricket team in the history of the game. He holds numerous cricketing records and has become a successful coach in the shorter versions of the sport.

One of Fleming's great attributes as Captain was his ability to analyse an opposition team. In a 2001-2 series against Australia, he showed this analytical ability at its best. Along with the coach he went through all of the Australian batsmen and worked out not just where their weaknesses were, but also their strengths. Then the New Zealand team did the unthinkable, they attacked the Australian batsmen where they were strong. Setting clever fielding positions and a bowling attack that fed to the Aussies strong points, the wickets fell and New Zealand beat Australia 3 times to knock them out of their own One Day Tournament. This was such a shock to the Aussies that they sacked their own long-term captain Steve Waugh.

These wins were largely achieved because the New Zealand team and Stephen Fleming in particular, understood that a person's greatest strength could also be their greatest weakness.

I think the church has the same problem when confronted with our gospel text. The strength of the church is that it is a place of community. We are a place of relationship. Some of you have known one another more years than I have been alive. You have known the husbands and wives who are no longer with us. The mothers and fathers, the children that have grown and left. You have shared good times and bad, this is the church's strength. All this sharing of life, done under the love and care of God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But this great strength of community becomes the church's great weakness when it comes to "being fishers of people."

This text from Mark 1 has frightened Christians for centuries. All but the hardest evangelists, missionaries and ministers hear this read and think oh no! Not that again. Like Jonah we don't want to listen. Part of the problem I think is that this text has always been preached with the sustained intensity we see in today's reading from Paul. Don't get married. Don't get involved in the world. Don't do anything except preach the gospel. This is the only thing worth doing. Everyone should become a missionary to Africa.

We all know that's not possible, or advisable, it's much more than most of us can cope with, but this is how we hear "be fishers of people" and we think I can't do that ... and so we often do nothing.

Even in our places of greatest strength, which is here in our home, our church building.

What I'm getting at is that the sharing of community, the relationship that binds all this together, that which makes being "fishers of people" possible, is meant to be natural. Meant to be simple. Meant to be "quite kiwi" in fact.

It's about being friendly, hospitable and welcoming.

The church's greatest strength is its community, its friendliness, its welcome. It's the glue that holds us all in place, it's much of what we love about coming along.

But like Stephen Fleming's analysis of the Australian batsmen, it can also be our greatest weakness. We are so pleased to be here, we get so involved in the things we have to do or talking to those we know, that we can miss the new person who may be coming along for the first time.

Our strength becomes our weakness and we miss these people.

It's especially important in an Anglican service where we have the peace, and then coffee or tea afterwards. The most important person in the service at the peace is not the preacher or the Vicar (it's never the Vicar), but the person we don't recognise. The most important person at tea or coffee after the service are not the friends, we have in the congregation ... but the visitor.

"Hi my name is Scott; I don't think we have met before."

And you are an official "fisher of people!"

Something natural, simple, something "quite kiwi", just being friendly, hospitable and welcoming.

This is our place and you are welcome here.

This is our place ... and it could be your place.

You never know, you could end up talking about the cricket...

Thanks be to God.