



MY PEOPLE

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A leader leads. You cannot lead without followers.

And sometimes a leader must go find his people.

His followers.

His flock.

I want to broach that subject with two of my heroes.

You may have heard of one. His name is Fred Luter.

You won't be familiar with the second hero. I'll save him for later.

Fred Luter is pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans. He has achieved fame as president of our Southern Baptist Convention.

I'm Southern Baptist. Don't get started. I know every caricature, joke, and stereotype about us. I can tell them and laugh harder than anyone.*

What makes Fred Luter unique is that he is black. And our Southern Baptist Convention broke away from other Baptists over the issue of black slavery.

I knew Fred Luter long before he became famous.

A generation ago, Fred was appointed as pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist, a declining church in a changing neighbourhood. That's a nice way of saying it was a once lily-white church, now surrounded by a black community. Pastor Fred was told, "Either revive this church or bury it."

God used Fred to build a strong church that reached out to its community. He's deeply loved among Louisiana Baptists for additional reasons. He's a great preacher. He loves people.

Fred is a caring pastor. He built a strong church in a tough part of New Orleans.

Then came Katrina.

Franklin Avenue Baptist was under ten feet of water. Fred's flock scattered all over the United States. His church, the building as well as the members, was gone.

He was a leader without followers. A shepherd without his flock.

So Fred Luter became proactive. He began searching for his people. Member by member, he tracked them down.

*Pastor Fred Luter Franklin Avenue Baptist
Church New Orleans, LA*



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He soon found that large pockets of Franklin Avenue members were located in Houston and Atlanta. So he began gathering his members together in those cities.

This meant a great deal of travel and flexibility on Fred's part. It didn't matter. He'd found his people,

And he was doing what he was called to do. *Pastor and preach* to the Franklin Avenue congregation.

Over time, evacuees began trickling back into New Orleans. Many chose not to return, but others went back to rebuild their city. However, those from Franklin Avenue found their church and neighbourhood destroyed.

So the reconvened church began using the facilities of a sister church, First Baptist New Orleans.

Eventually, a new and beautiful Franklin Avenue Baptist Church was built in the same neighbourhood.

A strong church in a recovering community. Led by one of my heroes, a shepherd named Fred.

My second hero is Dinka, South Sudan's largest tribe.

His name is John Monchoyl.

He's also a pastor.

A church planter in Upper Nile State.

*Pastor John Monchoyl Church Planter
Upper Nile State South Sudan*



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He'd started five churches in and around Malakal, the largest city in the state. Malakal is inhabited by three tribes: Dinka, Nuer, and Shilluk.

John's an equal opportunity church planter. He planted churches for each tribal group as well as several mixed congregations.

When South Sudan descended into anarchy just before Christmas 2013, the areas with mixed tribal groups saw the worst violence.

Malakal was fought over by government forces and the rebels. It changed hands five times in a matter of months. The only safe place was in the local UN compound.

John and his family plus other dependents made their way to Juba, South Sudan's capital. They then began the long journey to West Nile District Uganda.

That's when we met him. He was moving his extended family of ten to Arua. They registered at a nearby refugee settlement, Rhino Camp.

John told us point blank, "I'm leaving my family here where it's safe, but I'm going back to South Sudan."

His jaw tightened. "That's where my people are. They're hurting and suffering

and I must be back among them."

I'd been following the BBC's reports on the fighting in Malakal and its description as a "ghost town."

The town had been razed. John had gotten word told all of the churches were burned and gutted.

I wondered what awaited Pastor John's back in Malakal.

Were his church members who stayed still alive?

What he would find there?

It didn't matter to John. He was going to where his people were. To the place where they needed him most. If they were suffering, he would suffer with them.

He would give them the greatest gift of a leader: His presence in a time of trouble.

I've received texts from Pastor John in Malakal. He says things are safe and he is fine. It's hard to read between the lines of an SMS, so I'll take him at his word.

Will you join us in praying for John Monchoyl and the Malakal Baptist Churches?

[Read more \(http://www.bpnews.net/BPnews.asp?id=42000\)](http://www.bpnews.net/BPnews.asp?id=42000) on John's Story

A leader, who like my friend Pastor Fred, went to find his people.