<u>Series</u>: *YOUR MISSION…* January 13, 2008

LOOK LIKE JESUS
1 Corinthians 9:19-24

I. INTRO

A. One of the first questions most new parents get asked is, "So, ***who*** does she look like???" Really! As if ***anyone*** could tell at that moment. "Well, actually, she looks like…Great Uncle Fred—after he's been doing his exercises. You know, wrinkles, red face, no hair? We're ***hoping*** that will change!"

1. Over time, children do tend to resemble one parent or the other—or maybe even some long lost descendant. The color of hair, the build, the eyes, the tone of skin—the DNA definitely comes through.

   -It has some very interesting manifestations! Some kids come out defiant—you know, a cigar in one hand and a martini in the other. Some are very sensitive.

2. But then as a child develops, both Moms and Dads make a grab for the good stuff—and push away the bad. "Oh, I think he got that from ***my*** side!" And when there's a tantrum, "Well, we all know where he got ***that*** from!"

B. We've just come through Christmas; our celebration of the birth of Jesus. Have you ever wondered what Jesus actually looked like? How much he cried? When he took his first step? Whether or not he liked sweet stuff? If he ever pushed food away and wrinkled up his nose? How old ***He*** was when he got potty trained?

1. Unfortunately, the best and oldest records don't say a ***word*** about what Jesus looked like. One falsified record from 1514 said he was tall, well-built, had long curly hair, blue eyes—and never laughed! And you can't go by the *Jesus* you see in movies—especially the older ones. It' like He's always looking at something in the distance that isn't there and talking in weird phrases. Emotionless. Like Jesus on drugs.

2. We don't really ***know*** what Jesus looked like—but from everything we are told, He was apparently indistinguishable from any other middle-aged man in Palestine, 30 A.D. When it came to his physical characteristics, He looked, talked, smelled…***normal.***

3. But there was something ***extraordinarily*** different about how He looked as a person; who He ***was.*** He was unforgettable. He looked normal—but changed history forever.
   -And it's clear that his followers looked like Him. The DNA is apparently found, not in the appearance or the personality of Jesus. It must be found in something much deeper; Jesus' soul; His attitudes; His value system.

4. Our mission as His followers in this world is to be Jesus' Body. As you know, your DNA, your unmistakable fingerprint is found in every single cell of your body. If they find your DNA somewhere—it's proof that either you were there—or someone who had contact with you was there.

-Here's my sense. I believe that as the community of Jesus, with His Spirit living in our hearts, there should be increasing evidence that we haven't just left bits of cells behind us—but evidence that Jesus has been there.

That is our mission. And I would like to take some time to explore what that would look like.

II. WHEN JESUS LOOKED LIKE US…

A. John, one of Jesus' first—and closest disciples—opens his biography of Jesus by saying,

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him.
(John 1:1-3 NLT) It's clear from what John says here that the ***Word*** is, in fact, God.
-A few sentences later, John identifies who this **Word** is:
So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son. (John 1:14 NLT)

1. Let's just be really honest, okay? The mystery of God taking on human form is ***way*** beyond us. This mystery goes deeper than any mystery the Bible teaches—that God has no beginning and no limits to His Being or His power.

   -That raises other questions. How could God become a man—and be fully human? How could Jesus pray to God—and ***be*** God? My answer? I ***really*** don't know. My only response is awe; wonder! All I know is that I also don't know and can't explain ***lots*** of other things about God that are mysterious. But I'm okay with God being mysterious! Are you?

2. The closest the Bible comes in explaining this is found in the writings of Paul, ancient church leader and follower of Jesus. After pleading with these people to humble themselves and put others first, he writes:

   You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave, and was born as a human being.
   When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.
   (Philippians 2:5-8 NLT)

3. Somehow, in a way we can't possibly understand, Jesus, Son of God, ***humbled*** Himself.
   He didn't cling to his rights, but gave up his divine privileges. He left perfection, and came to our world, lived under our leaders, ate our food, took on our limitations—even though he had existed from all eternity and created everything that exists. The term we use to describe this is ***incarnation.***
   -This early leader, Paul, says, "Look like Jesus. Your attitude should be the same as His." Of course, the question is—***why?***

-Well, the entire NT is clear on this. Human rebellion—sin—had ruined God's plan for the humans He created—as well as the entire context He created for them to live in. The only way to make us right—and restore what we destroyed--was to pay the cost Himself—death—and offer eternal life to people as a free gift. The motivation was extreme love—of a kind we can barely grasp. I tried to think about what this meant for Jesus, the Son.

a. At some point in eternity, a decision was made. Jesus, the Son, would be the One to come. He would lay everything aside and become just like the very people he had created, with all their limitations. He would become vulnerable to hurt, rejection, disease and death.

b. The ***reason?*** Love. Love of a kind we can't fully understand—because it has no counterpart in our world. The closest would be the love of a parent for a child.

c. The plan was—that the Son of God would be born as a baby to a young virgin through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus would be born in poverty, raised by human parents, and live in a nation occupied by foreign soldiers. He would live out the compassion of God for the broken, the oppressed, the enslaved, the contaminated—and He would give his life away. He would show people, in a way they could understand, what God really ***looked*** like.
-And He would experience the ultimate consequence of sin. Death. Then He would defeat it by His resurrection—proving that He was and is who He claimed to be all along. God. The Son. The Almighty One.

B. Now. All I've said so far is set-up. Here's where I want to go. By what Jesus did on the cross, He made it possible for His Spirit to take up residence in our lives. Through His Spirit, He goes with us everywhere and gives us all we need to carry on Jesus' mission of love, compassion, and restoration in this world.

1. The plan is that we incarnate—or live out in our everyday lives—the character and mission of Jesus wherever we go. I want you to think for just a moment about how ***brilliant*** that is and how ***powerful*** it is.
-Imagine what it would be like for Jesus to be present at every board meeting in your company. At every meeting of Parliament. In every public school, high school, and university classroom. In every neighborhood, every store, every alley, every tenement building—***everywhere!*** Right now there are around 2.8 billion people on this planet who claim to be followers of Jesus. Imagine what would happen if every single one of them would just awaken. Be Jesus—right where they are?
-***That,*** friends, is God's plan. That's what Jesus was talking about when He taught us to pray, ***Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven [on screen].*** When we pray that way, we're saying, "God—I want up there to come down here. I will fully cooperate with your leadership and power as you make all things right!"

2. I'll tell you, at the core, what the implications are to that. It means that, as individuals and as the Community of Jesus, we fully cooperate and link all parts of our lives up with what God wants to accomplish.
-See, the people of our world system need to somehow see Jesus for Who He ***really*** is. The only Jesus many of them know is the distorted image of Him they sometimes see in movies and religion and with TV evangelists. The GTA has more nations represented here than any other city in the world. What if the ***only*** picture of Jesus some may have is from the Crusades, or from people who tried to ***colonize*** Jesus into their nation—or from some nauseating lukewarm version of Jesus represented by people who claim His Name, but live for themselves.
-Here's the question: Where will people ever see Jesus if He's not living out his grace, his kindness, his love, his mercy, his compassion, his power—and His incredible love through us? How can people understand the Good News about Jesus and choose to follow Him if truth isn't communicated in a way that makes sense?

3. Paul, the first person to carry Good News to the non-Jewish world, talked about this in a letter he wrote. In addressing how Followers of Jesus should be willing to lay aside their rights, he says:
Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ. When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law. When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ.
When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ.
Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings. (1 Corinthians 9:19-23 NLT)

-Some could read this and say, "Paul, you're being a chameleon--changing your skin to fit whoever you're with!"
Ever seen someone do that to avoid conflict or criticism?
-What I see is Paul imitating Jesus. He was incarnating the life of Jesus in different ways with to different people so they could understand the Good News. Paul was intentionally ***giving up his rights*** to make sure Jesus was clearly seen. His goal was the reclamation and restoration of people's hearts—***to save some!***. As he says,
I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings. **(1 Corinthians 9:23 NLT)**

4. One of our core values at The Olive Branch is that we want to be culturally relevant. First, that ***doesn't*** mean that we water down the Good News, hide the cost of following Jesus, and try really hard to be cool so that people will like us.

It simply means that we will do ***everything*** in our power to make Jesus as clear as possible; who He is and what He says to people like us.
-Here's the deal. If we just do church as it's been done for years and expect that everyone's going to come in and hang around until they understand the code language and secret handshakes—we will ***miss*** the opportunity of a lifetime. God is shaking up our world, and working in it ***way*** out to the fringes! People are on the search for Someone to believe in and a way to make a difference.
-And there is no one more trustworthy than Jesus to believe in—and no better way to make a difference than to engage his mission on this planet to make everything—and **everybody** right! These, friends, are exciting days! And the world is not looking for perfect people, it's looking for imperfect people who incarnate, reflect the character and life of Jesus. Who ***look like Jesus!***

III. WHAT *DID* JESUS LOOK LIKE?

A. If our calling is to look like Jesus—what ***did*** He look like—and what would that mean in our world? Well, interestingly enough, He didn't look or act like a religious professional, and didn't even hang around the Temple that much. When He taught he told stories the people could understand.
-In fact, Jesus wasn't into religion at all—which sheds some light on why irreligious people loved him and wanted to be with him. Take away on that? Looking like Jesus will probably not make you a more religious person.

1. That's a little surprising—until you begin to see that religion ***tends*** to be the institutionalized form of love for God; the formalized process of people trying to gain access to God so they can manage and control Him. God did not invent religion! In fact, it would be quite true to say that Jesus came to kill religion—and offer Himself as the way to come directly to God.
2. So, if we're going to look like Jesus, we will be people who, like Jesus, are willing to lay aside our rights, our status—and our lives—for a purpose way, ***way*** greater than we are.

   a. Jesus was vulnerable. As God the Son—He had been ***invulnerable*** in the most extreme sense. He literally showed up as a fetus, a clump of growing cells in Mary's womb. Then he was born—and had to be protected, fed, loved, cuddled.
   -Jesus once described the salvation and restoration of the human heart as being ***born again.*** It's an act of spiritual vulnerability and humility. And He also said to his disciples, "Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven."
   -We'd rather be invulnerable, wouldn't we? Sometimes we go to great lengths to protect our egos, our reputations and the soft side of our lives. If you want to look like Jesus, there is a part of you that has to risk. To go places where you're not confident that everyone will be impressed!
   b. Jesus was filled with compassion. He was always reaching out to people, helping them, feeding them, healing them. Compassion should be one of the defining characteristics of Jesus' followers.
   -Think for just a minute about what it is that moves our hearts about Mother Theresa. It's her compassion, isn't it? When Jesus was asked

about what it means to love your neighbor—he told a story about a man offering help to someone from a race that hated people like him. Like a Jew stopping to help a terrorist.

c. One of the most amazing things about Jesus was His humility. Anyone here ever in your life struggled with pride? We don't have ***anything*** to brag about, yet the God who created ***everything*** is humble. Most people, when they see pride, ***never*** say, "Wow! That looks just like Jesus!" Cause it doesn't.
-Humility is an extremely ***potent*** force. Think about it. If you were going to get married—who would you choose—someone who's humble—or proud? I don't care what the relationship is—I would always vote for humility over pride and self-confidence. Anyone feel the same?
-As a side note here, I can't think of a way to be like Jesus—or even receive the gift of life He offers—without humility.

3. The Son of God—***had*** all the rights by virtue of Who He was. He had seniority. He owned all the copyrights and owners rights for everything on this planet. As God, he had the rights to give orders and enforce them. But he ***didn't cling*** to them. He voluntarily laid them aside—for us.
-Why? Out of love. For some strange reason, He saw value in us—infinite value that we don't even see ourselves. Apparently, giving up His rights and coming here as a human was the ***only*** way to redeem us and keep us from destruction. Somehow—mysterious to us, it was the ***better*** way, and all eternity was enriched by what He did.

B. Now. Here's the deal. We, as followers of Jesus, are His Body. He's in charge of the whole thing. As His Body—we carry on ***His*** Mission, ***His*** way, with ***His*** character—doing what ***He*** did. The Church's was never intended to be a safe little cocoon, or a finishing school where people can clean up their act until they get beamed up to Heaven. The Church is ***Jesus'*** Body—doing ***His*** work of making things right in this world, seeking and saving that which was lost.

1. Now, let me tell you where this becomes intensely personal for us—as a community—for ***me*** as a person—and for ***you.*** Do you mind if I put it really crudely? We have to make a choice: What will my relationship with Jesus be like? Am I going to ***use*** Jesus, or is He going to ***use*** me? To some extent, this is a growth thing. Let me try to lay it out for you as best I can.

a. There are some people who might state their relationship with Jesus like this: ***Jesus will be my patron saint, solver of my problems, healer of my body.*** Jesus is my good buddy in the sky; my go-to person when life gets tough.
-In this kind of relationship, Jesus is the Giver, and I am the Taker. We ***all*** start at that point. Sometimes the Church of Jesus has caused people to get stuck there. "Come once a week—or once a month to visit Jesus here, make sure the church is your place to get hatched, matched and dispatched, participate in some of our rituals—and you'll be fine."

-I don't think anyone enjoys a relationship for any length of time where we get used. Parent-child relationships start out like that—but they're supposed to ***change,*** right? ***Right?***.

b. Another step in our relationship with Jesus could be put like this: ***I will invite Jesus to be a part of my life—and imitate Him/do what He recommends—but only WHEN IT MAKES SENSE AND FITS MY LIFESTYLE.***

-I'll tell you what the core issue is for many people who choose to follow Jesus. We're going to talk more about this next week, but it's the issue of who's in charge—me or Jesus?

c. The third way—the one Jesus ultimately called us to—is described in his words in Luke 9: Then he told them what they could expect for themselves:

"Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat—I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you?" (Luke 9:23-25 Msg)

-What is a body part called that won't do what the brain—the head—tells it to do? It's called ***paralyzed.*** If you've personally experienced this, you know how frustrating it is.

-If you are part of the Body of Christ—and therefore, the ***Mission*** of Christ in this world, I don't think that's where you want to be and what you want to do, is it?

2. Jesus did not promise people that they would get $1000 back for every $100 they give. He didn't promise that He would make sense of every situation and resolve every problem. He didn't promise that when we chose to radically obey Him, all the people around us would understand and congratulate our decision.

a. Jesus made a radical ask of those who would follow Him. He said, "If you're out for the cheap, easy, quick path of saving your own skin, you'll lose your life. If you will give your life away—let Me lead—I'll give you ***real*** life!" The path we travel—when we follow Jesus—is marked with the blood of those who have gone before us.

-Our ***calling*** is to look like Jesus. Romans 8 tells us that God's plan for all eternity is to conform us to the image of His Son. To use all the things that happen to help us look like Jesus—in the way He served, in the humility He showed, in the depth of His character, and in the impact He had.

-That's where the thrill of following Jesus is. That's where the life is! And that's where we begin to make a difference. Jesus made it very clear.

b. The alternative? Well, it's to be squished into the same mold as everyone else in our world system. Just another person looking for a semi-comfortable life. Crazy busy, of course, cause, see, that's what we 2008 GTA people do best. A little self-preoccupied—occasionally looking for an adrenalin rush to spice things up. Generally trying to

either lose weight—or buff up. And, of course, a little worried about the future. God? Jesus? Well, His wisdom is generally pretty safe to follow. He's a good ***ingredient*** in life—and a ***great*** insurance policy.
-Oh, and try to make your mark and grab your 15 minutes of fame before it's over.

c. That, friends, is not what Jesus died to do. He left His Mission to people who would also ***incarnate*** His life—carry His DNA wherever they went. They did. And ***that's*** why they turned their world upside down.
-And that's what the world is waiting to see. I don't think it looks as weird as you might think, if that's what you're worried about.

3. I've been trying like crazy to lay out the pattern. Do you see it? For thousands of years, the world grinds on—through bloodshed, through moral chaos, through child sacrifice—the world soaked with the blood and the tears of humans. The only way to deal with the whole thing is to go after the roots. It's sin—and all the hopelessness and sadness it brings. God the Son says, "I'll go." He lays everything on the line—and comes in humility, vulnerable to the same monsters who have oppressed everyone the can touch.
-And the Son offers another way—the way of forgiveness and grace and life and love. His ministry lasts three years, before **his** blood soaks the ground at the foot of a Roman cross. All hope seems to be lost. Even his closest followers seem to get scattered. But He rises from the dead—and suddenly, everyone understands that it's a new day.
-This New Kingdom didn't look like they thought it would—it's a Kingdom of Hearts; a Kingdom of loyalty—people who will lay down their lives for Jesus; people who will radically love, forgive, serve and give their lives away.
-Predictably, they all get harassed, imprisoned, exiled. Many die. But they can't be stopped. What do you do with someone who says, "You can kill me and take everything I own—but I will still love you—and, by the way, ***Jesus is Lord!***."

4. Paul was another in line, incarnating the life and love and sacrifice of Jesus. As he said, his goal, like Jesus, was to save as many as possible. To redeem the souls of others, to change this world to the core—no matter what the personal cost was. He said, "I consider myself as one who has no rights—except to do the will of Jesus—and see His kingdom expand—one person, one home, one little house church, one city at a time.
-His end was quite predictable. Hatred—and fear—is always predictable. The insane Emperor, Nero, blamed the burning of Rome on followers of Jesus—and condemned Paul to death. One day, an executioner had Paul lay his neck on the block, and the great mind that wrote a large chunk of the NT was severed from the body that carried it—and the spirit went to Jesus.
-But that didn't stop things. No. If anything, it drove the Good News of the Kingdom deeper into the hearts of those who knew it—and drove the message further than it had ever gone.

5. And now. It's our turn. In a world of 6.5 billion people—as lost and broken as ever. Facing incredible crises of an AIDS epidemic, the rise of terrorism, nations of people who still believe that the way to peace is to kill, predators who

now have even more sophisticated ways to find victims and hide their behavior. We stand before a world of need, starvation, extreme poverty, waste, global warming, brokenness—and above all, ***above all***—incredible lostness and darkness. If Jesus lived now, you can bet that He would find a way to wade right into the middle of it.
-And He ***does--***but now we're His Body. He sends His Spirit—the Spirit of Jesus to give us power and courage and ***live*** through us. Without Him—we can't do a thing. With Him? Well—He's ***God.*** Think about it! So, Jesus asks, "Will you, will you, will you incarnate the humility, the love, the compassion, the hope I came to give. You're next in line—will you just live the life I've given you before a world that needs to somehow just see Me? It's okay! I'll be ***with you***!"

a. See, here's the deal. We can't somehow live ***outside*** the lostness and brokenness—and gingerly reach in and snatch people out of it. Jesus enters that world through the lives of ordinary people—just like you and me. You don't have to go somewhere ***else*** and do that. That's not what Jesus usually asks. He almost always asks us to let Him live through us right where we are. At Wal-Mart. In cubicle-land. In a University classroom. At Markham District. At Bay and Yonge. At No Frills, Loblaws, Dollarama.

b. I don't know about you, but I usually don't feel equal to the task of having other people get a picture of Jesus through me. I'm small and faulty. I goof up. So I try to have them come into a small grouping of Followers, or a service like this. If they see ***others--***like Karen Pascal and John Deacon and Kevin Macnab and Blaise and Brian Cunnington and our teens—they can get a better feel for what Jesus is like—so they can love Him and worship Him and give themselves for Him too.
-Cause, see, we live in a world that is ***very*** suspicious of Christianity—but ***dying*** to see Jesus. Strange thing, ***I*** need to die so they can!

IV. CLOSING THOUGHTS

A. If I could only accomplish one thing in this whole vision series, it would simply be that all of us, including me, see Jesus more clearly—and love Him more passionately than ever before. See, I think if we see Him clearly—like, ***really*** clearly—our deepest longing will be not only to be like Him—but to bring Him wherever we are. Live out His life, His joy, His compassion, His love.

B. I can't begin to imagine the impact on our world if Jesus was simply able to walk into every home, every office—every place where we find ourselves—and live out the beauty of His life through us! That's all He asks. The question for me is—can I somehow get beyond the bumpy chicken skin exterior of fear in my heart—and ***let*** Him!